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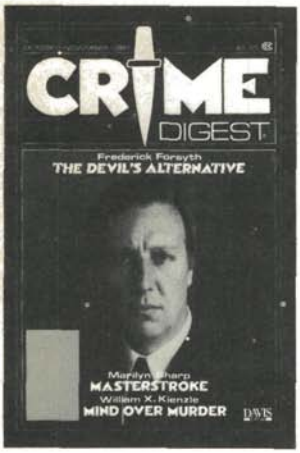


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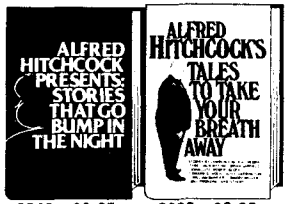


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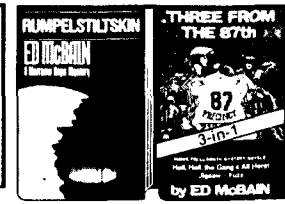


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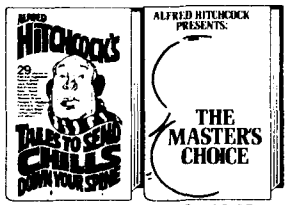


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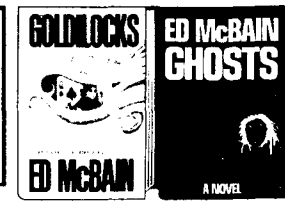


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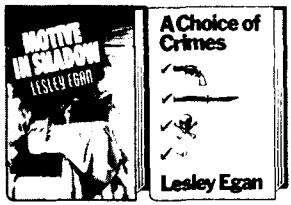


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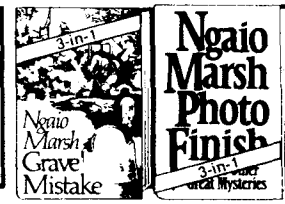


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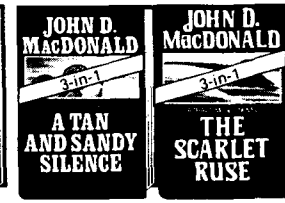


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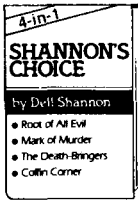


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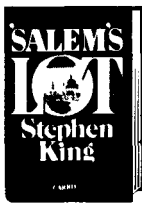


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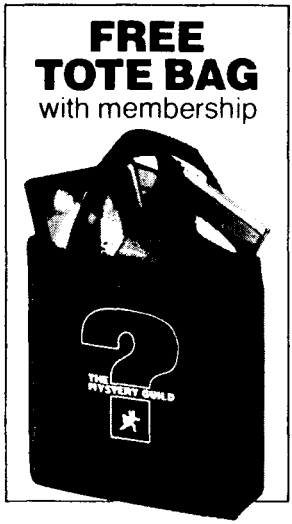


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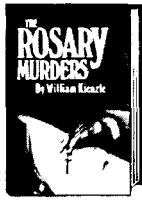


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**a *NEW* Mr. Calder and Mr. Behrens story by**

**MICHAEL GILBERT**

*Sir Boris Wykes held one of the most important and sensitive positions in the world. He was in charge of England's chain of Early Warning Stations in East Anglia. When a highly respected University don made an accusation against Sir Boris—something unthinkable—Mr. Behrens was called in, and when the net of inquiry spread ever wider, Mr. Calder joined in the investigation . . . Which is more useful in Intelligence—a modern computer or good old-fashioned legwork?*

# DANGEROUS ENEMY

***by MICHAEL GILBERT***

"The trouble with Intelligence work nowadays," said Mr. Calder, "is that it has become obsessed with gadgets. In the old days an operator who was told to obtain some piece of information went to the most likely source and by the appropriate expenditure of cash or cunning—"

"Force or fraud," agreed Mr. Behrens sleepily.

"Exactly. He brought home the bacon. But how does your modern operator work? He sits on his backside all day, in a huge room—" Mr. Calder demonstrated the size of the room by spreading his arms and knocked a tobacco jar off the table. Fortunately it fell on top of Rasselas who was asleep on the floor beside his chair. Rasselas looked reproachful. Mr. Calder replaced the jar.

"A huge room crammed with machines. Screens linked to radar trackers and listening posts, wireless sets in touch with patrolling spy planes and submarines, and bank upon bank of computers to digest and analyze and classify the unceasing flow of incoming information, most of it pointless—"

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"Talking of banks," said Mr. Behrens, who was listening to one word in ten of what Mr. Calder was saying, "I had a call from Fortescue this morning. He wants to see me tomorrow."

"Both of us?"

"No. Just me."

"Good. Rasselas and I have other plans for tomorrow."

The great dog thumped his tail in agreement. The July weather was much too fine to make the thought of London attractive.

"He said that it was a problem which called for the intellectual outlook."

"It's probably a new and even more complicated computer," said Mr. Calder.

Mr. Fortescue, who was the Manager of the Westminster Branch of the London and Home Counties Bank and had other less public functions in and around Whitehall, received Mr. Behrens in his sanctum, invited him to be seated, and said, "A fortnight ago the Home Secretary got a letter from Professor Wilfred Pitt-Hammersley of St. Ambrose College, Cambridge. It stated that Sir Boris Wykes is not Sir Boris Wykes at all, but an East German spy named Stefan Thugutt."

When Mr. Behrens had absorbed this extraordinary announcement he said, "I suppose the Home Secretary does get a lot of letters from cranks and maniacs."

"Would you describe Pitt-Hammersley as a crank or a maniac?"

"It's at least ten years since I met him. We worked together on the Jansen Enquiry. I thought he was a little eccentric, but certainly not crazy. He must be getting on now—"

"Seventy-four next April. It is true that when senescence sets in at one of our great Universities, it is apt to be overlooked."

"You mean that a lot of the dons are a bit offbeat, so one more doesn't stick out."

"Do you know Sir Boris?"

"I know of him, of course. He's the Government whiz-kid in charge of our Early Warning System."

"Wykes," said Mr. Fortescue, "is not a kid. He was born in 1927 and is now forty-three years old. He is one of the most eminent experts in the country in the fields of radar and applied electronics. At present he is in charge, under the Chiefs of Staff Air Defence Committee, of the chain of Early Warning Stations in East Anglia which we operate in conjunction with the Americans."

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"Then I can understand the alarm and despondency if there did happen to be any truth in Pitt-Hammersley's statement. But there isn't, is there? I mean, Wykes must have been doubly vetted before he was allowed anywhere near such a vital slice of our defences."

"Trebly. Once in the normal way, when he came to this country from Poland. His real name, by the way, is Wychech. He changed it to Wykes when he was naturalized in 1952. He was positively vetted when he came into Government service three years later and rechecked under the special procedure when he started working in Early Warning in 1960."

"Special procedure? That means that someone actually went to Poland and talked to relatives and friends?"

"Dick Raphael did it. It was one of the last jobs he did for us. He went to Sweden and Poland."

"Sweden?"

"Wycech's father was a Polish army officer. He was one of the victims of the massacre at Katyn. Boris was sixteen at the time. His mother smuggled him away to Sweden. He spent the rest of the War working in the Nor-Jensen factory. The boy showed promise, even at that age, as an engineer and a scientist. As soon as the war was over he went back to Poland to look for his family, which consisted, as he thought, of mother, two older brothers, and two nephews. It seems they were in Warsaw at the time of the abortive Bor-Komarowski rising. The four boys were shot by the Germans. The mother died of disease or malnutrition in a camp soon afterwards. Boris' only surviving relative was in England. Squadron-Leader Andreas Wychech, holder of the Polish Order of Merit and the British D.S.O. and D.F.C."

"I thought the name rang a bell," said Mr. Behrens. "Didn't he lead the low-level raid on St. Nazaire?"

"He was a very gallant man," said Mr. Fortescue. "He was shot down in the last months of the war, in Italy. When young Boris found he had no family left in Poland, and made up his mind to come to England—that was at the end of 1946—he was well received on account of his uncle's services to this country. He was awarded a visiting student-ship at Oxford and produced a thesis on electronic detection which impressed everyone so much with its practical possibilities that it was at once put on the Restricted Index. The rest of Boris' history is public knowledge. Apart from a two-year attachment at Columbia University in New York he has never been out

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of England since. Certainly he has never shown any desire to revisit Poland."

So far Mr. Fortescue had been speaking without reference to his papers. Now he cast an eye on the dossier in front of him.

"What else? He's a bachelor. He lives in a converted farmhouse near Thetford, which is convenient for his work. His only close friends are intellectuals and scientists. His hobbies are punting and canoeing. He has no known vices, except hard work."

"In fact," said Mr. Behrens, "his life is an open book for all to read. And has been for a quarter of a century. Can anyone be taking this seriously?"

"We thought it right to inform the Americans. They have assigned one of their men to the job, Eben Thom, who happens, fortunately, to be an expert in linguistics."

"How on earth does linguistics come into it?"

"Pitt-Hammersley is also a linguistics man. He holds the Dexter Chair of English Language and Literature and has managed to combine it with a study of the modern science of lingual interpretation."

"By computer?"

"Using a computer, certainly. Why?"

"Just a thought," said Mr. Behrens. "Please go on."

"In 1938 Pitt-Hammersley was a tutor at St. Ambrose, and this East German boy, Stefan Thugutt, studied under him. Pitt-Hammersley was so impressed by the quality of his work that he kept copies of everything Stefan wrote. The other day he happened to be reading a collection of the scientific papers of Sir Boris Wykes, and says that he was immediately struck by certain stylistic and constructional similarities between them and the work of young Stefan. He submitted both sets of documents to a full computerized analysis, and decided that, without any doubt, they came from the same hand."

"Although one lot of papers was written more than thirty years before the other."

"Your basic linguistic periphrases are, I understand, like your fingerprints. Once formed, they don't change with age."

"Didn't I read somewhere the other day that these linguistic boys had decided that Shakespeare didn't write half of his own plays?"

"There are cranks at work in every scientific discipline," said Mr. Fortescue. "I have mentioned your name to the Warden, Dr. Lovell. He is very willing to lodge you at the College. Being vacation time,

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there will not be many dons or students in residence. Professor Thom is there already. He will give you any necessary technical help. I understand, by the way, that he likes to be addressed as Ben."

Mr. Behrens was as nearly speechless as he had ever found himself in his dealings with Mr. Fortescue. He said, "You want me to go and stay at St. Ambrose's so that I can decide whether one of the senior dons is cuckoo?"

"That is, roughly, the position," agreed Mr. Fortescue blandly. "It is not, of course, the only step we are taking in the matter. I intend to send one of our men to Sweden and Poland to recheck Raphael's work."

"Send Calder," said Mr. Behrens. "He was telling me only yesterday that in *real* intelligence work legs were more useful than computers."

Dinner at the High Table had been agreeable, and six of them were now gathered companionably in the Warden's room cracking walnuts and sampling his port and madeira. On the Warden's right sat the massive Mrs. Hebrang, professor of Far Eastern Languages; on his left Eben Thom, a solemn Bostonian. On Mr. Behrens' right was the stooping, gray-haired figure of Professor Pitt-Hammersley, and opposite him Michael Mitos, bald and cheerful and understood to specialize in Eastern languages.

The conversation so far had not been as alarming as Mr. Behrens had feared. It dealt with the ballistics of fast bowling, the government commission on monopolies, the comparative power of trade unions in England and America, on which Ben Thom had had some enlightening comments to make, and on fishing.

Michael Mitos was talking about fishing now. He said, "It has been ruined by your English upper classes with their passion for exercise. Fishing is intended by nature to be a static pursuit. You visualize the heron at the pool, motionless as the branch of an old tree? Only the English could have turned it into a game, where you race up and down the stream, hurling in a fly with the action of an over-arm bowler—"

"You mean that you fish with *bait?*" said the Warden. He sounded slightly horrified.

"Certainly, Warden. Sometimes a worm. Sometimes a piece of fat bacon. I sit on the landing stage at the foot of my garden. I watch the river flowing by. I think long thoughts about life. Occasionally a fish attaches itself to my hook. I reel it in, cook it, and eat it."

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"I agree," said Mrs. Hebrang, "that fishing bores with their pet flies are almost as bad as golf bores with their pet clubs, but that is not a criticism of the sport. It is a criticism of their own limited mentality."

Mr. Behrens had been devoting only half of his mind to the conversation. The other half was trying to work out how soon he could organize a private talk with Pitt-Hammersley without it appearing too obvious to the others. He was spared the trouble. As he rose to go, Pitt-Hammersley said, "We were talking about government commissions. You remember that affair we were engaged in together, Behrens?"

"The Jansen Enquiry?"

"Yes. I always wondered if anyone took any steps to implement our recommendations."

"In a number of details only, I believe."

"Perhaps you could join me in my room for a nightcap. I wouldn't want to bore everyone with such a specialized topic. Right? Come along then."

Pitt-Hammersley led the way to his room, lit the gas fire, emptied a chair by shifting a pile of books which were on it onto the floor, drew up a second chair, and invited his guest to be seated. Then he said, "Of course you don't want to talk about Jansen. What a silly man he was! You want to talk about my letter."

"Then the Warden has told you why I'm here?"

"No. But you're more famous than you think you are. I had dinner not long ago at the Dons-in-London, and Sands-Douglas pointed you out to me. I suppose the Home Secretary has had you sent down to see if I'm mad." Pitt-Hammersley emitted a cackle. "I've known Willie since he was up here himself. That was when he came back from the war. I've never had a high opinion of his mental powers, but I suppose a thick skin is more use in politics than a good brain. Right?"

Mr. Behrens said, "I should imagine that a certain mental agility is necessary if you are to survive in politics." He was glad that he was spared having to deal with Pitt-Hammersley's opening ruse. "Perhaps our best starting point would be if you could tell me something about Thugutt."

"Stefan, yes. For a young man he had an extraordinarily alert intelligence. I would suggest a subject. Not necessarily a scientific subject. He would write a paper on it. Anything I cared to suggest. It became almost a game between us. Chess? Claret? Breakfast

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foods? It was good practise for his English which was remarkably good already, although there were occasional Teutonic modes of thought which gave him away. You remember how dear old Quiller-Couch used to impress on his students the desirability of using Anglo-Saxon words in preference to their Romance equivalents. With Stefan it was the other way round. The hard, middle-German derivatives were natural to him. He felt he had to introduce occasional French stocks to decorate his prose. Like a bachelor buying a bunch of flowers to decorate his study, and not knowing quite how to arrange them."

"And it was these quirks of style which you identified in the writings of Sir Boris Wykes?"

"Not that alone. Good heavens, no. My dear boy, linguistics isn't guesswork. It's a science."

"Most science is guesswork," said Mr. Behrens.

Pitt-Hammersley cocked his head on one side like an old turkey, and then said, "That is either a very sensible or a very stupid remark. Scientific discovery *starts* as guesswork. The rest of it is a series of coordinated efforts to limit alternative explanations for an observed phenomenon. When they have all been eliminated you have established a sequence of cause and effect."

Mr. Behrens was saved from having to answer this by the gas fire, which gave a soft pop and went out. Pitt-Hammersley got to his feet, in the three or four distinct movements into which an old man divides a simple physical effort, turned the fire off, fed a coin into the meter, and relit the fire.

"A sequence of cause and effect," said Mr. Behrens. "No money. No gas. No gas, no fire."

"Ah! But have you eliminated all the alternatives? There might have been air in the pipe. Eh? It happens sometimes. But in this case I fancy you were right."

"You were saying that there are other similarities. Enough of them to establish a scientific correlation?"

"Enough of them to establish a strong *presumption*. A marked similarity of vocabulary. The computer identified one hundred and twenty-five comparatively uncommon words in both samples. But more conclusive than this was the similarity of rhythm. Even an inexpert musician would not confuse the rhythms of Bach and Mozart, would they?"

"No, but he might confuse the rhythms of Bach and someone who was trying to imitate Bach."

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"Perhaps. But people who write are unconscious of their own rhythm. There is therefore no question of deliberate imitation."

"I must accept your word for it," said Mr. Behrens. He was beginning to feel sleepy. "Tell me. What happened to Thugutt?"

"In 1939, when the authorities belatedly discovered that he was a German, he was interned. Typical bureaucratic stupidity. It turned a valuable friend into a dangerous enemy. Later he was sent over to Canada. The Canadian authorities allowed him to continue his studies at Toronto. It was there that he first seriously took up the study of electronics."

"And after the war?"

"I can only tell you that he did not return here. I believe he went back to his home in East Germany and continued his studies, for a time, at Cracow University."

"A lot of East Germany," said Mr. Behrens thoughtfully, "had by that time been incorporated into Poland. If Thugutt *was* back there in 1946, he and Wychech *could* have met. I mean, the times and place roughly correspond."

Pitt-Hammersley looked at him over the top of his glasses. "So," he said, "I am not an old lunatic after all. Hey?"

"That's just what I'd like to be sure about," said Mr. Behrens. But this was to himself, when he was getting into bed.

"It was twenty-five years ago," agreed Mr. Calder, "but I sometimes find it easier to remember things twenty-five years ago than things which happened last week."

"That is true," said Olav Vinström. "Alas, the older we get the truer it becomes."

It had taken Mr. Calder two days of hard work to find Olav. There had been no difficulty about his initial contacts. His credentials had secured him cooperation from the General Director of the Nor-Jensen factory, but it was not the heads of the outfit that he wanted. They had been the people Dick Raphael had talked to in 1960. The General Director remembered Raphael. He had produced a photograph of Wychech and it had been compared with the photograph on his temporary identity card which had been filed away in the archives. The resemblance was reasonable enough. But it was not the photograph alone. Wychech—or Wykes, as he was by then—had furnished Raphael with a great number of names and nicknames, personal recollections and factory gossip, all of which Raphael had quickly checked.

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Too quickly, perhaps, thought Mr. Calder. But in 1960 Raphael had been a sick man. He had died less than a year later. Was that why he had spent only one morning in Oslo and only half a day in Warsaw? When the gray shadow is creeping up, other matters may become relatively less important.

What Mr. Calder had been looking for was a man who had worked with Wychech. Not necessarily alongside him, but in the same department. In the end he had found Olav Vinström. And Vinström had given him the lead he wanted.

"A nice boy, Boris," he said. "A good worker. He and his friend, Tadeus Rek. Both bright, intelligent lads."

"Tadeus was a close friend?"

"Certainly. They were both exiles from Poland. Boys of about the same age. Tadeus was a Danziger. I heard that he had gone back and was working in the shipyard."

Twenty-four hours later Mr. Calder was talking to Colonel Mauger, British Military Attaché at Warsaw, and an old friend. The Colonel said, "I've made a few inquiries. Rek is certainly alive. Very much so."

"You mean that he's an important man now?"

"Not in the sense of being a prominent businessman or politician. Far from it. On the face of it he is no more than a workman. The sort of position he occupies in the shipyard would be called a chief shop steward. That is to say, it would be if they had unions and shop stewards. He is referred to as a 'man of confidence.' The man the management go to if they want rows settled quietly."

"Can you tell me anything more about him?"

"A little. He and Boris Wychech both came back from Sweden early in 1946, no doubt full of patriotism and anti-Russian feeling. By that time the old resistance fighters were split. One part of them wanted to parade the streets and drum up enthusiasm. They were easy meat for the Russians. The others went underground, and young Tadeus went with them. They had learned their lesson from Russian history. Keep your heads down and work through the workers. They grow in power every year. If ever there is a serious strike in Poland you can be sure the N.S.Z., as they are called, will be behind it."

"And Tadeus is one of their leaders?"

"Impossible to say. I do know that he has a personal reason to hate the Russians. In 1946 his brother was shot for his part in organizing the pro-Anders revolt at Cracow University."

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There had been something in Mr. Behrens' report about Cracow University. Mr. Calder groped for it, but lost it. He said, "Can you put me in touch with someone in Danzig who could arrange a meeting for me with Rek."

"Do what I can," said Mauger. "Don't expect miracles. Telephone me the name of your hotel when you get fixed up. May take some time."

"In this particular case," said Mr. Calder, "time is not the essence."

It was in the evening, three days later, when Mr. Calder was debating whether he would dine out or sample the table d'hôte of the modest quay-side hotel where he was lodging, that the car drove up and a thickset man got out and said, "Herr Kaldor?"

"I expect that's me," said Mr. Calder. "Who are you?" His own Polish was elementary, and he normally spoke in German, which he found most Poles understood.

"From Tadeus," said the man.

"Splendid," said Mr. Calder. He was motioned into the front seat beside the driver. The thickset man climbed into the back beside a second man who was already sitting there. All three men wore dark, nondescript suits which might have indicated anything from a clerk to a workman in his best. All three, to Mr. Calder's practised eye, looked tough.

The car threaded its way through the tiny, cobbled streets around the waterfront, branching off finally into one so narrow that the overhanging roofs of the houses seemed to be propping each other up. The car stopped. The two men in the back got out, motioning sharply to Mr. Calder to follow. The driver, too, had climbed out and was close behind him. Mr. Calder had an uncomfortable feeling that he was a prisoner under escort.

Down a passage, through a side door, up a flight of steps, and into a back room. The only window was shuttered. There was a table, with half a dozen chairs round it, but no other furniture. Behind the table sat a black-haired, hook-nosed man in his middle forties. There were other men in the background, but he was the only one seated. He radiated the sort of authority which clothes a man who has fought a hard road to the top.

Mr. Calder stepped forward, held out his hand, and said, "Tadeus Rek?"

The hand was ignored. The man said, "That is my name. What is your name? Your real name, I mean of course. Perhaps you have several names, just as you seem to have several languages."

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"My name is Calder."

Out of the corner of his eye he noted one of the men at the far end of the room stirring. Mr. Calder had an impression of snow-white hair, a brown face, and a broken nose. A distant recollection. He turned his attention to Rek.

Rek said, "You must excuse my caution. The man who contacted me on your behalf is known to be a police spy."

"I'm sorry," said Mr. Calder. "He was the only contact available."

"I trust that your explanation for intruding on me will be satisfactory. The last man who forced his attentions on us unhappily turned out also to be a police spy. What became of him in the end, Peter?"

The man who had brought Mr. Calder in the car said, speaking also in German, "He had an accident. He slipped and fell into the dock. Unhappily he broke both arms when falling. He drowned."

"I trust—" said Mr. Calder. But before he could say any more the white-haired man had come up to the table. He peered into Mr. Calder's face, then seized him and kissed him on both cheeks.

He said, "This is no Russian spy, Tadeus. It is a very old friend. An Englishman. A splendid person. He helped me to murder three Gestapo agents in Albania in 1943."

"One of the servants," said Mr. Behrens, "making a final round of the college, smelled gas coming from Pitt-Hammersley's sitting room. He went in and managed to get a window open. The door to the adjoining bedroom was open. Pitt-Hammersley was in bed. They tried everything, but it was no good. So that, I'm afraid, is really the end of it."

"Why?" said Mr. Fortescue sharply.

"Because of what was found on his table."

"A confession?"

"No, no. Nothing like that. It was a paper he must have been working on for the last few months. His magnum opus, you might say. He'd just that moment finished it. Then, no doubt he pottered off to bed leaving the gas fire on, and it blew out. Air in the pipe. He told me that happened sometimes."

"But—" said Mr. Fortescue.

"It was the paper," said Mr. Behrens unhappily. "He has proved, using the most ultra-scientific modern computerized linguistic methods that Boswell didn't exist."

"If he didn't exist, who—?"

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"*Johnson* was Boswell. He wrote his own biography."

"But that's mad," said Mr. Fortescue. "Quite apart from his life of Johnson, Boswell wrote other works. He was a known historical character. There are dozens of independent witnesses to his existence."

"Quite so."

"You mean that this paper proves that Pitt-Hammersley was mad?"

"Not exactly. But it does mean that if his version of linguistics is capable of producing a result like that, then one can surely place no reliance at all on his identification of Wychech with Thugutt."

"I see what you mean," said Mr. Fortescue. He was unaccountably angry. "It also means that his death may have been accidental."

"It never occurred to me that it could have been anything else," said Mr. Behrens. "I agree that it would have been an easy way of finishing off the old man. Anyone could have come along when he was asleep and turned the gas on. Doors are rarely locked in a place like that."

"Exactly."

"Yes. But we're arguing in a circle. If Wykes really was a mole it would have made sense to remove *and* discredit the man who was threatening to expose him. But we've just concluded that he isn't."

The telephone on Mr. Fortescue's desk purred. He lifted the receiver, then said, "No. I'm busy. Who? Oh, well perhaps you'd better put him through."

He listened in silence for some minutes while the voice at the other end spoke. Then he said, "All right, Ben. He's here with me. I'll tell him." And to Mr. Behrens, "That was Thom. He has now had a chance to analyze the paper which was found on Pitt-Hammersley's table, by the most modern ultra-scientific methods, and has concluded that Pitt-Hammersley didn't write it. I think you'd better get back to Cambridge."

"Maybe the same ultra-scientific methods will tell us who *did* write it," said Mr. Behrens hopefully.

"Certainly not," said Thom. "To do that I'd have to have lengthy samples of the output of everyone here. What I was able to do without difficulty was to spot that the Boswell paper was a clumsy fraud. Linguistics may not be an exact science, but it will show up a phony right enough. Anyway, I think it's clear who wrote it. We've got a

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certain amount of dope back in Washington on this man Mitos. It was partly to keep an eye on him that I came over here."

"Then," said Mr. Behrens, who was slowly trying to absorb this new idea, "you think there *is* something in Pitt-Hammersley's theory, and that Mitos was instructed to remove him and throw ridicule on it at the same time."

"There's no certainty about it, but that eminent functionary who watches over our incomings and outgoings—"

"The hall porter."

"That's the joker. He sleeps over the gate. He tells me he heard Mitos' car driving off at about one in the morning. He thought it was unusual, because he's never known him to stay so late."

"What the devil are we going to do about it?" said Mr. Behrens. He felt curiously helpless.

"I agree with your invocation of the devil," said Professor Thom, "because it's a diabolical situation. All that we have to go on so far is surmise and guesswork. But let's add two and two together for a moment and see where it gets us. Suppose Wykes is a plant. He'd be a very valuable plant. He'd need watering and tending. He'd also need a handy method of getting information back to base. Now Mitos has a bungalow on the river bank, three or four miles below Cambridge. He sits on his landing stage in the evening, fishing. Wykes is a punting and canoeing enthusiast. You follow what I'm thinking?"

"I follow you completely," said Mr. Behrens. "But if we're going to move against Mitos on the sort of information we've got, we're going to need a clearance from higher up."

"Right from the top," said Thom. "But if you figure on their reactions when they think there's now a chance—an outside chance, I grant you—that the Russians have managed to get their hands on a big slice of the East-West Early Warning System, I would surmise that the gloves will be off and Queensberry rules will be discarded."

"I must apologize," said Tadeus Rek, "for your somewhat dramatic reception, but we are well aware that the authorities are becoming frightened of our influence, and would give much to discredit us. In particular, by some purported involvement in espionage. Now that I understand what you want, I naturally acquit you of any such intentions. What you have told me is a curious story. It might be true."

"How well did you know Boris Wychech?"

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"For two years, as boys, in Sweden. We had been very close. When we came back here, we both obtained places at the University at Cracow. Stefan Thugutt, fresh back from internment in Canada, was there too. Boris joined with enthusiasm in all the patriotic anti-Russian demonstrations. So did my brother. Me, I was not happy. I was younger then, and inexperienced, but not stupid. A riot was planned in honor of our war hero, General Anders. I saw trouble coming. I removed myself from the University, and took a job as a workman.

"The riot gave the Russians' puppet Radkiewiz and his political police the chance they wanted. Thugutt acted as spy and agent provocateur. I learned of that later, after the riot had been stamped on, and the leaders shot, my brother among them. As you may imagine, when I learned of this I took all possible steps to trace Thugutt. But he and Wychech had both disappeared. It was astonishing. It was as though they had never existed."

"One possible explanation would be, wouldn't it," said Mr. Calder slowly, "that Russian Intelligence saw an opportunity of carrying out one of their favorite substitution tricks? There was the superficial resemblance between the two young men, and the fact that their studies had been in the same field. Add to that the fact that all of Wychech's family were dead. His uncle's reputation would insure his substitute a friendly reception in England. All that was necessary was to extract from Wychech every detail of his past, and to prime Thugutt with this background information. Wychech is obliterated. Thugutt comes to England, changes his name to Wykes, and lives quietly for at least fifteen years before he starts to move into a sensitive job. The chances of discovery would become smaller every year."

"As you say, it is possible. I suppose that I am the one person who could make the matter a certainty."

"Would you be willing to help? I could make all arrangements very quickly. And, of course, at no expense to you."

"My dear Mr. Calder, if this man should turn out, in fact, to be Stefan Thugutt, the pleasure of meeting him again would be an ample reward in itself."

The smile which accompanied these words was one of the coldest, thought Mr. Calder, that he had ever seen on a human face.

"I had a message last night from my chief," said Mr. Behrens.

He and Ben Thom were sitting together, after breakfast, on a

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bench in the Warden's private garden. Bees hummed among the riot of July flowers in the deep borders. Pigeons cooed. The buttery cat strolled across the smooth-shaven lawn, keeping one eye on the pigeons.

"Special Branch are picking up Mitos at his bungalow this morning and taking him to London. He has been told that some question has arisen over his papers. Since he is not operating under diplomatic cover, but is here as a private citizen, he was unable to object. The whole thing has been arranged to give me a chance to make a very careful search of the premises."

"You and me," said Thom.

"Really, Ben. There's no need—"

"You're not keeping me out of it. After all this cerebral work a little activity will be a welcome change."

"All right," said Mr. Behrens. "If that's how you feel about it I'd be glad of your company. Can you pick a lock?"

"I majored in Lock Picking. We'll go in my car."

"No. We'll go by boat. Much the least conspicuous way. A two-oar skiff should get us there in an hour."

Mr. Behrens had overestimated his skill as an oarsman but it was well before midday when he tied up the boat under a willow tree fifty yards short of the Mitos bungalow.

"On foot from here," said Mr. Behrens. "We can keep under cover until we get to the garden."

The bungalow was an isolated one, approached on the landward side by a long dusty sideroad. The lawn sloped down to the river. On the other side the bank was wild and overgrown.

"A perfect spot for a contract job," said Thom. They walked up the path together. They were twenty yards from the building when Mr. Behrens stopped.

"I'm not absolutely certain," said Mr. Behrens, "but I did think I saw the curtain in that window move a fraction."

"Then clearly the first thing to do," said Thom, "is to ring the bell. If there's someone there, they answer the door and we're two boat-trippers who forgot to bring any water for their kettle, and don't trust river water. Okay?"

"That seems sound," said Mr. Behrens.

The back of the bungalow was a glassed-in veranda. There was no bell by the door but there was a knocker. Mr. Behrens executed a lengthy and lively tattoo on it. Nothing happened.

Professor Thom was already busy with a selection of thin steel

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spikes. Some had spatulate tips, some ended in hooks. He handled them with the familiarity and firmness of a surgeon. The lock was evidently more complicated than he had expected. "A curious lock to find on the back door of an innocent bungalow," he said to Mr. Behrens. In three minutes he had it open and they stepped inside.

The veranda was full of stored heat and silence. A step led up to an inner door. This was unlocked. Mr. Behrens opened it, stepped inside, and stopped.

"Something wrong?" said Professor Thom.

"Not really," said Mr. Behrens.

Mr. Calder was seated on the sofa with a stranger beside him.

"Allow me to introduce my friend," said Mr. Calder. "Tadeus Rek, of Danzig. Mr. Behrens. And—?"

"Professor Eben Thom of Columbia University."

"I think," said Mr. Calder a little later, "that it's time we joined up the two sides of this affair. Tadeus has been very useful to us already. He identified Michael Mitos, from a photograph, as a minor functionary in Russian Intelligence. An unimportant intellectual who was probably blackmailed into coming to England. He is not a very brave man. His credentials are being examined. The supposition is that he was acting as link-man to someone much more important."

"That someone," said Mr. Behrens, "being Sir Boris Wykes."

"That we shall shortly find out. A message has been conveyed to a certain quarter—I said that Mitos was not very brave. If what we suspect is correct, it should result in someone attempting to contact Mitos."

"Coming here, you mean?" said Professor Thom. There was a look in his eye which seemed to suggest that further activity would not be displeasing to him.

"That is the supposition. The message stressed that a contact was urgent, but it might not be effective before tomorrow. Fortunately there is plenty of food in the house. However, I suggest"—he was looking at Mr. Behrens as he said this—"that a reception committee of four might be excessive."

"I think you're right," said Mr. Behrens slowly. "Besides, Ben, we must bear in mind we have hired our boat by the hour. A substantial monetary penalty will be exacted if we keep it out overnight."

"Very well," said Professor Thom reluctantly. "If that's what you think would be best."

Rek said, with the justifiable pride of one employing a colloqui-

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alism in a foreign tongue, "That's the way the cookie crumbles, Professor."

Sir Boris Wykes, paddling his canoe expertly down the smooth reaches of the Cam, was not unduly alarmed. Mitos was inclined to panic. He had asked, more than once, for him to be replaced by a more reliable operator but it had been difficult to find anyone with the precise qualifications.

The message had reached him, through established channels, and verified by the current code word, at five o'clock on the previous afternoon. He gathered that it was something to do with Mitos' papers. It had mentioned urgency. Wykes was too old a hand to be hurried.

Fortunately he had already mentioned to one or two friends that he was planning to take a boat out on the following afternoon and he had adhered to this timetable.

As he came round the bend he saw the familiar figure seated on the landing stage, a fishing rod in his hand and the same floppy old sunhat on his head. So! The authorities had *not* detained Mitos. Another false alarm.

Three swift strokes with the paddle drove the canoe toward the stage. The fishermen looked up.

A moment of paralyzed shock.

The man was a stranger. Or was he? He was certainly not Mitos.

"My name is Rek," said the fisherman. "Tadeus Rek." One brown and muscular hand had grasped the edge of the canoe. "We met once or twice, no more I think, in 1946 at Cracow. On the other hand, you knew my brother, Andreas, rather well. It was on account of your information that he was shot. That makes what we have to do much easier."

Wykes fended off wildly from the landing stage, hitting at Rek's hand with the paddle. It was an ineffective gesture. Mr. Calder had come up behind him and was holding the other end of the canoe firmly.

"First Pitt-Hammersley," said the Warden. "Now Mitos. We are the playthings of fate." He was alone in his study with Mr. Behrens.

"I learn this morning that the authorities have not only detained Mitos, they have refused to allow him out of custody pending deportation. Is this a police state? Is there nothing we can do?"

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"You could appeal to the Home Secretary," said Mr. Behrens, but he said it without much confidence.

The Warden's eye fell on the morning paper that Mr. Behrens had put down. "Boating Tragedy," said the headline, "Eminent Scientist Feared Drowned. A canoe, which had been hired on the previous afternoon by Sir Boris Wykes, the Government scientist in charge of the East Coast Early Warning System, was found this morning floating bottom up in the Cam five miles below Cambridge. The body of the canoeist has not been recovered. That stretch of the river is notorious for its underwater weed bed which is known to have trapped quite strong swimmers. The river above the point where the canoe was found is being dragged."

Mr. Behrens thought it very unlikely that the body would be recovered.

"I shall have to put up a notice." The Warden made a note on his pad. "Urging students not to go boating single-handed. I've done so before, but young people take little notice of warnings." He reverted to his original grievance. "I suppose," he said to Mr. Behrens, "that you wouldn't care—just as a temporary measure—to take over Pitt-Hammersley's lectures. I understand you are something of an expert on the subjects that he covered."

"I'm afraid not, Warden," said Mr. Behrens. "I'd like to help, but I've come to the reluctant conclusion that the science of linguistics is too dangerous to be meddled with by amateurs."

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*"And I figure even an old man can be taught a lesson—if he's got all his marbles" . . .*

# ACE IN THE HOLE

**by J. F. PEIRCE**

"I never lose," he said. "*Never!* Never lost a poker game in my whole life."

Since he was under thirty that wasn't saying a hell of a lot.

He appeared to be addressing Mike, the manager of the gift shop in the Las Vegas hotel-casino where I hang my hat. But in reality he was addressing me—calling me out the way young gunslingers used to call out the top guns in the Old West, hoping thereby to gain an instant reputation. In most cases they gained an instant burial on Boot Hill.

He was calling *me* out because I'm one of the top poker players in Vegas. I've won the annual High-Stakes, Draw-Poker Competition for the past three years. You could say I'm "the fastest draw in the West." Sorry about that.

"I can beat anybody!" the punk said, looking at me for the first time. "*Anybody!* Ain't no old man, living or dead, can beat me at poker."

I was over twice his age and getting older by the minute. But I don't think of myself as old. Except when I first get up in the morning. And I don't appreciate people calling attention to my age.

The punk was dressed like a dude. I learned later *that* was what he was called. "Dude!" He wore a black cowboy hat with a low flat crown, a red vest, a frilly white shirt with red garters holding up its sleeves, a black string tie, and black slacks. His white ostrich-skin boots must have cost $2000.

He was wearing dark glasses with mirror lenses, and he took them off to see me better. He was obviously unimpressed with what he saw. Not that I blamed him.

I can look at Mike, the manager of the gift shop, and see myself. We're both short and stocky. Dumpy, really. And no matter how

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much we spend on clothes, they look rumpled the first time we wear them.

The dude's face, like the rest of him, was razor-sharp. His eyes were china-blue. I've seen marbles with more expression.

Mike and I have faces that look like badly eroded topographical maps of Ireland.

"Care for a game of poker, old man?" the dude asked as if he were doing me a favor.

Mike exploded. "Know who you're talkin' to, sonny?" he demanded. "This is Punxsutawney Pat, the champion draw-poker player in the whole world. He was playin' championship poker 'fore you was born. He's won more poker matches than you dirtied diapers."

"That makes him an old man, then," the dude said. "And I figure even an old man can be taught a lesson—if he's got all his marbles. How about it, old man, want me to teach you how to play poker?"

I was getting tired—hell, I *was* tired of this dude calling me an old man. Of course, *that* could be his strategy to insure I'd play.

"How much is this lesson going to cost me?" I asked.

"One hundred thousand dollars! We'll have an eight-hour, head-to-head session of five-card stud. Just the two of us. No kibitzers. We'll each bring one hundred thousand dollars in new hundred-dollar bills and use them as chips. At the end of eight hours we'll quit—win, lose, or draw. The winner takes all the money. Unless, of course, I've won it all before that."

I hesitated, thinking it over.

"What's the matter, old man? Can't you afford it?"

"*I* can," I said. "Can *you?*"

The dude sneered. "I'm the one giving the lesson!"

I didn't like the smell of it, but this dude was begging for someone to teach him a lesson, and I figured that someone might as well be me.

"Where and when do we play?" I asked.

"How about your room tomorrow at one? That should give you time to get your hundred thousand."

I smiled. The money was no problem. I could get it quickly and at a bargain. One of the local mob lived at the hotel.

"We'll have drinks and sandwiches sent in," the dude said. "And neither of us will leave the table till the game's over—except to go to the john. We'll meet here tomorrow at a quarter to one and pick up eight decks of new cards. Agreed?"

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"Agreed."

With that he swaggered out. He hadn't offered to shake hands or exchange names, for which I was grateful.

After breakfast the next morning I saw the dude talking to Mike in the gift shop. The dude was doing most of the talking.

"What was *that* about?" I asked Mike once the dude had left.

Mike put eight packs of new cards on the counter. They were the hotel brand, the only brand of cards Mike sold.

I raised my eyebrows questioningly.

"He offered me a thousand dollars to sell the two of you these cards when you come in before one."

"Did you take the money?"

He smiled. "Of course!" he said.

"Mind if I borrow them?" I asked. "I'll get them back before the game."

"Be my guest," Mike said.

"I'll need a bottle of glue."

He got it for me, and I took the cards up to my room.

I rent the room by the year. I have my own hot plate and refrigerator and fix most of my own meals. Both the food and the prices in the hotel are indigestible.

I heated water in the teakettle and steamed the tax stamps off all eight packs. After examining the cards, I reglued the stamps and returned the cards to Mike.

"Were they marked?" he asked.

"Not unless he's got a new method of marking I never heard of."

Mike frowned. "Then what's his gimmick?"

"I got the impression he wanted me to see the two of you talking. Maybe he's trying to psyche me out."

"Why would he pay a thousand dollars to psyche you out?"

"We're playing for a *hundred* thou. Remember?"

He hesitated. "Did you mark the cards?"

"No."

"Do you plan to cheat?" He should have known better.

"Not at cards," I said. "I can beat a punk like that nine times out of ten. And do it honestly! What fun would it be to cheat? If I cheated, it would be a job like any other. I've never cheated at cards. Never!"

I was beginning to sound like the dude. He'd gotten my back up whether that had been his intention or not. I planned to teach him a lesson.

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"What if *he* cheats," Mike asked, "or it turns out to be that tenth time?"

"Then I'll lose."

What I didn't tell Mike was that I had an "ace in the hole."

I showed up at the gift shop promptly at a quarter to one. The dude was already there—looking smug. We were both carrying our money in attaché cases.

Mike put the eight packs of cards on the counter and made a face. I couldn't tell whether he was giving me some sort of signal, warning me to be careful, or having an attack of gas from eating his lunch at the hotel.

I took out my wallet, but the dude pushed my hand away.

"I wouldn't want your poker lesson to cost you more than a hundred thousand," he said.

I shrugged and put my wallet back in my pocket.

We started play with our money piled in front of us. The hundred-dollar bills made excellent "chips." There's nothing like the feel of a crisp new bill between your fingers.

The play was even for the first few hours. Then it turned in my favor.

The dude was good. Damned good! Almost as good as he thought he was. But he wasn't good enough. He wasn't as good as me.

He'd have done better if he had concentrated on playing, but he kept trying to psyche me out.

At first when he got a good hand, he'd line his cards up neatly in front of him. And when he had a poor hand he'd leave them spread out on the table. This was a trap, I quickly discovered. For after a while he'd leave his cards spread out when he had a good hand and line them up when he was bluffing.

He kept switching back and forth, even though it didn't work. I guess he thought it would keep me off balance guessing, and I'd misplay. But by then I'd found my own clue to what he was holding. A small vein in his forehead always pulsed when he had a good hand.

At times he tried to shine light in my eyes with the mirror lenses of his glasses, but I adjusted the light so that my eyes were in shadow.

I don't wear dark glasses, even though they prevent your giving your play away with eye movements. Of course, they also help you

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to see some kinds of markings on the backs of cards. I carry colored lenses in my pocket to check the cards if luck goes against me.

So far as I could tell, the dude never cheated. I wished he had. It would've been more of a challenge.

At the end of eight hours, with close to eighty thousand dollars of the dude's money in front of me, I called, "Time!"

I gathered up the cards we'd been playing with, put them back in the pack, and placed the pack with the others.

The dude pushed his chair back from the table and crossed his legs, pulling his trousers above his ostrich-skin boots. He was taking his defeat better than I expected.

"Well," I said, "you can no longer say you've never lost at poker."

He smiled and shook his head, then tipped his hat back on his head with his right thumb. "I calculate *I'm* the winner," he said.

"How do you calculate that?"

"Because *you* cheated!"

I started to rise, but he pulled a nasty-looking little gun from his boot, and I sat back down again.

"What makes you think I cheated?" I demanded.

"I saw you take the cards out of the gift shop. You marked them!"

I was right. He had wanted me to see him talking to Mike. He had tried to set me up. I didn't tell him that I hadn't marked the cards. What good would it have done?

"What proof do you have that I marked them?" I asked.

He gestured to the pile of money in front of me. "You won!" he said. As far as he was concerned it was as simple as that. He wasn't willing to credit me with good luck or good play.

"After you returned the cards to the gift shop," he continued, "I persuaded the manager to testify, *if* needed, that you'd taken the cards from the shop and marked them."

My eyebrows shot up in surprise. I couldn't believe it. "How were you able to persuade Mike to do that?" I demanded.

"With five thousand dollars."

I shook my head in disbelief. "I can't see how holding a gun on me and claiming that I cheated makes *you* a winner," I said.

The dude smiled. "I never said I always *won* at poker. I said I *never lost*, which is not the same thing. This gun's my insurance, why I've never lost—even when I've been beaten."

He opened his attaché case and raked the money and the cards into it.

"Just remember," he said, "you've more to lose than a hundred

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thousand dollars. If word gets out you cheated, you'll never play poker for money in this town again."

And of course he was right.

"So don't try to stop me! Remember I've got proof—the marked cards and the gift-shop manager's testimony."

He had it all figured out.

"Just take your loss gracefully and I'll never tell that you cheated." With that he walked out the door.

As soon as he was gone, I called the front desk.

The hotel security men stopped him at the entrance and turned him over to the police.

He was charged with carrying a concealed weapon and possession of $100,000 in counterfeit bills.

He claimed he'd won the counterfeit money from me playing cards—which I, of course, denied.

We both claimed the genuine money.

The court awarded the money to me when his story didn't hold up. The cards *weren't* marked, and Mike denied that I'd ever taken them from the gift shop.

Mike said that the dude had tried to bribe him to testify that I had and that he had reported the attempted bribe to the police when he had been unable to warn me. Police records supported his story.

The dude should have noticed the resemblance between Mike and me. We're brothers. I don't use my surname—to save my family embarrassment because I'm a professional gambler.

And if he were half as smart as he thought he was, he would've known I was playing with funny money. There's nothing like the feel of a crisp new bill between your fingers.

I'd gotten the counterfeit stuff for $1000. It was *my* insurance in case I lost that he'd be taught a lesson. I won't cheat at cards, but that doesn't mean I'm a candidate for sainthood.

Calling me "old man" cost the dude $106,000 and six months in jail—an expensive lesson.

"Q"

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**a *NEW* short story by**

**WILLIAM BANKIER**

*A tightly packed crime short story, so full of incident that its story line could easily have been filled out to novella length—indeed, the basic skeleton of the plot could even have been fleshed out, in these "digest" days, to crime-novel length . . .*

# ONLY IF YOU GET CAUGHT

***by WILLIAM BANKIER***

Ken Ragsdale never waited for an elevator at five o'clock. He always trotted down the sixteen flights to the lobby and was out on Dorchester Boulevard while the rest of them were still waiting up in the reception room. Barbie had suggested this strategy to him on one of her visits. Barbie never let circumstances control her, *she* controlled *them.*

He could go now and get his car or he could walk over to The Little Club for one drink. The latter option made more sense. Let the traffic thin out—that was the usual rationale.

As he moved down the street, Ragsdale almost bumped into a stocky man with a familiar face. He had been hovering near the building entrance and now he floated forward. "Hello, Ken."

The high thin voice stirred Ragsdale's memory. "Fred Step! How are you?"

"Long time no see. Where have you been hiding yourself?"

The question seemed provocative. Step sounded as if he had come to pick a fight. In the old days he had always been a humorless individual, but then he was one of a group and so the effect was minimized. Now here he was focused on Ragsdale alone and his influence was unsettling. The phrase that came curiously to Ragsdale's mind was "around the bend."

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"I'm not hiding. We're in the phone book." Then, because this sounded rude and because old Fred was only being himself, Ragsdale went on to say, "Are you doing any singing?"

"I still go to choir. After what happened I quit for a while, but now I'm back at it."

Ragsdale watched Step's eyes go flat as he referred to what happened. The event must have been significant, but Ragsdale did not know what the hell Step was talking about. "I gave up the choir after I got married," he said, telling Step what he must have known. "Is Professor Seaton still playing the organ?"

"He retired last year."

"Not a moment too soon." Ragsdale remembered the tiny white-haired organist having a go at *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring* one Sunday. The choir parts are short but the accompaniment flows on and on, never stopping. Those arthritic fingers butchered the music, an hilarious performance but pathetic at the same time. "Listen," Ragsdale said, "have you got time for a drink?"

When they settled at the bar, Ragsdale placed the order and paid for it. Behind the bottles their faces were pale in a dark mirror, like creatures of the deep. "I've been wondering whether to come and see you or not," Step said.

"I'm glad you did." The hostile silence deepened. "People were getting ready to leave the choir about the time I did. Who's the new tenor soloist?"

Whatever line of conversation Ragsdale attempted, nothing worked. He felt like a wild duck trying to talk to the hunter in the blind. Those cold eyes gave him sidelong glances and whenever he made a flippant remark they narrowed as if to inquire what exactly Ragsdale meant by saying *that*.

"Still working in the same place?" Ragsdale asked desperately when the church choir was dead and buried.

"I haven't worked for a while. I've been sick."

"Sorry to hear it. Are you all right now?"

"Oh, I'm all right," Step said. He turned on the stool and faced Ragsdale in a defiant posture. "*I'm* not going to fall over dead all of a sudden."

As if people did. Ragsdale finished his drink, looked at his watch, and said he was sorry he couldn't stay for another. "Nice to run into you, Fred. Take care." He hurried to the door.

"How do you live with yourself?" was the remark Step sent after him . . .

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Ragsdale told Barbie about the encounter over supper. He treated it as an amusing experience but, as always, his wife's acute intelligence saw through to his true feelings.

"If he keeps on bothering you, tell him to go to hell. Or you'll fix his clock."

Barbie Watson had come to Montreal from Swift Current, Saskatchewan years ago in pursuit of a hockey player who had been promoted in the Canadiens organization. She was only sixteen then, a rink-rat, one of the sharp, pretty, badly groomed little girls who hang around the fringes of the hockey world. Her boy friend was soon transferred to Quebec City, but Barbie had stayed on in Montreal.

She was too tough and too smart to do anything but succeed in life. Observing the well-dressed girls streaming along Ste. Catherine Street in the mornings, she decided to have some of that. She began polishing up her appearance. At the same time she taught herself to type and take shorthand, landed a job easily, and by the time Ragsdale met her on one of his Friday evening solo-drinking sessions, she was assistant to the personnel manager of the Kingsline Hotel.

They got on well. She found it easy to boss this articulate, courteous square with cuffs on his trousers. As for Ragsdale, he was intrigued by the wiry girl who combed her stylish hair with glossy fingernails and who smoked each cigarette down to the edge of the filter.

Ragsdale laughed at his wife's suggestion that he fix Step's clock. "There's no reason to get violent with him. Although I must say he gives the impression he might attack me at any minute."

"The world is full of crazy people," Barbie said. "Sooner or later you have to deal with them."

That evening they watched television. Barbie went upstairs around nine to sit in the spare room and do some bookkeeping. She had taken on the task of running the hotel's Credit Union; it was a lot of work but it meant extra money and status.

Ragsdale switched off after the late news, put two empty milk bottles at the front door, turned off the lights, and came upstairs. His wife was filling columns with neat Barbie figures. He stood over her for a minute watching her work. It seemed wrong to Ragsdale that this room was being used as an office. It ought to be a child's bedroom.

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Ragsdale dreamed sometimes of being a father. Married friends had families under way and on visits he never missed the opportunity to hold a baby.

"Watch out," the proud mother would warn him, "it's contagious."

No chance. Barbie had made it clear from the beginning that she was not interested in becoming a mother. Ragsdale could understand it. She had been set against the idea by her background in the poor family out west where babies had come too often and turned her mother into a physical wreck.

He hoped she would change her mind, but after three years of marriage he was not encouraged. Still, he loved her and needed her very much.

Bending down, Ragsdale kissed his wife on the hollow curve of her shoulder. She was wearing the gimmick belt she had brought with her from Saskatchewan; it had a length of chain attached to it with a clasp at one end like a dog's leash. He took this now and fastened it to a belt loop in his trousers; when he moved a step away she was drawn with him. In the early days, going walking, they clipped themselves together this way. Barbie had fixed up a similar belt for her husband. He liked it and wore it often.

"I think somebody wants me to stop working," Barbie said. She closed the ledger.

"You've worked enough. Time for play."

It was three o'clock that morning and they were sound asleep when the bedside telephone rang. Cursing and flinging his arm about in the darkness, Ragsdale finally made contact.

"Hello?"

"I asked you how you live with yourself." Fred Step's high voice echoed in the phone.

"Fred. Good Lord, do you know what time it is?"

"I don't find it as easy to sleep as some people do. I can't put the past out of my mind."

"Believe me, I don't know what you're talking about. You're angry with me about something, but I—"

Barbie was fully awake now. She reached across Ragsdale and tugged the phone from his hand. "Listen here, you," she said. Her voice was like sharp steel. "If you persist in bothering us, I'm going to make you sorry you were born. Is that *CLEAR?*" She slammed the telephone down.

They were so shaken, they got up and went into the kitchen where

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they drank milk and ate some madeira cake. Ragsdale took the kitchen phone off the hook. He suggested calling the police or the telephone company. Barbie vetoed that because their action, if any, would take a long time.

"Let's wait and see if he keeps it up," she said. Then, a measured wait later, "What does he have against you?"

"I honestly don't know. We were in the tenor section of the choir. He was always very quiet, a little strange. We were never friends. Then I left after we got married and moved out here. Since then I haven't seen the man till this afternoon."

Ragsdale stood by the window, then moved away as he imagined vividly a sniper's bullet shattering the glass. "I think the man is paranoid," he said.

"Try to remember if anything happened between you," Barbie said. "We have to know what we're dealing with here."

Hours later, half asleep, Ragsdale heard the deliberate crash of milk bottles breaking on pavement—first one and then another. He was going to get up but Barbie had not been disturbed. He decided to stay where he was; too late to do anything anyway.

In the morning, waiting for the kettle to boil, they came out with broom and dustpan to sweep up the patch of broken glass from the front walk. "This was him again," Ragsdale said. "I'm sure of it. Can we call the police now?"

"What proof have you? Anyway, don't worry, I'm thinking about it. If Mr. Step keeps it up, I intend to take care of him."

Two days later Ragsdale said exactly the wrong thing to his wife. They had been to a concert at Place des Arts and were now having a late supper at Desjardins. "Any further signs of our night caller?" she asked him as he stared into space.

Ragsdale had to admit he had observed Step standing across the street watching him when he came out of the office to go to lunch the day before. Then he said what was on his mind. "The boss mentioned an opening for a product manager in the Toronto office. He says I can have it if I want it."

"What did you say?"

"That I'd consider it."

She pushed her plate away with an abrupt gesture. She shook a cigarette from her pack, lit it quickly, and blew smoke straight up. Ragsdale knew he was watching the movements of her abusive father. "You must be crazy. Leave Montreal to go and work in To-

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ronto? That graveyard? This choir friend of yours must really have got to you."

"I didn't say it's because of Fred."

"I know you better than you know yourself." Her face was grim. "I'm not going to have my life turned upside down. Somebody else is, not me."

Due to attend a meeting at the advertising agency, Ragsdale came out of the office just as it began to rain. He was lucky—there were still a few empty taxis cruising. He hailed one and as he opened the back door and slid across the seat, he felt a presence behind him.

Fred Step was getting into the cab and slamming the door. It would have been funny had it not been so blood-chilling.

Ragsdale gave the address to the driver—fortunately not more than a few minutes away. Then he confronted the ashen face beside him. "Fred, this has got to stop. My wife is getting very upset."

"You've still got a wife. That puts you ahead of me."

It was the first clue as to what the man was getting at. "Were you married?"

"Don't play games, you know I was married."

"I didn't."

"Cora Pendleton. If you say you don't remember her, I'll—"

"Cora." Ragsdale searched his memory. Of course, the plain little girl who sang alto in the choir! She never had a word to say to anybody. She was no bigger than a minute. "I remember her. Did you and Cora get married?"

"Somebody had to marry her. People like you may not think it's important."

There was something at the back of Ragsdale's memory, a faint presence that refused to come forward. "I seem to recall a party, we were all there. It was to celebrate Professor Seaton's thirtieth year as choir leader."

"See, you *do* remember."

"But that's all. I can't see what you've got against me."

"She's dead. Cora didn't make it. That's what I've got against you."

The taxi pulled up at its destination. As he paid, Ragsdale said, "I'm sorry for whatever happened, Fred. You've got to believe it still isn't clear in my mind. But if I wronged you and Cora in any way, I'm sorry."

They got out of the car together. "You think an apology is going to make it all right? You don't know me very well."

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That was true. Ken Ragsdale was beginning to realize he did not know Fred Step at all. He hurried away and left the dangerously bitter man standing in the rain.

When he told Barbie on the phone that Step had actually forced his way into a taxi with him, she said, "That's it, then. He's trying to ruin our lives."

"Exactly. That is his intention. He seems to think I've ruined his."

"And you don't remember how?"

"No. He's talking now about a girl who used to sing alto. She was a little mouse. Apparently he married her and she died. It seems to have put him around the bend."

"Okay. He's got troubles, so have we." She sounded brisk, she had been thinking. "Our problem is to get rid of Fred Step once and for all. I've figured a way."

"What is it?"

"We'll kill him, it's as simple as that."

"You're joking."

"I'm not. I'll explain my plan when we get home tonight. Do you want to stop at Mama Mia on the way? Get a large, all-dressed and two green salads."

Through the dining-room window Ragsdale could see the area of new grass laid only the day before by the landscape gardeners. The sods had not yet taken, their rectangular outlines clearly visible adjoining the established lawn. Barbie was talking about how easily they could remove some sods and put them back.

"I watched the men working," she said. "They turned the earth down to a depth of about two feet. It would be easy digging. We'd just lift enough sods, dig down a few feet, put him in, and put back the earth and the sods." She refilled her glass with chianti. "There'd be some earth left over but we could scatter it around the flowers. I give the whole job less than an hour with the two of us working. Even after dark."

"It's too extreme. How would we kill him?"

"I'd do that. Leave that to me."

"I can't believe you're serious."

"I wish you could see yourself." Barbie was sitting erect, her eyes wide, her shoulders back. This was about the best project she had ever got her teeth into. "A maniac has come out of the past, stopping you in the street, hinting at revenge over some imagined injustice.

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He calls us at three in the morning. He breaks our milk bottles. He even forced his way into your cab. This is threatening behavior and it's getting worse."

"All right, maybe we should call the police. Let them talk to him."

"They won't. They'll say if he does anything else, let us know. That leaves you having to go to them next week and say he threw a bottle of acid in your wife's face."

"Barbie, come on!"

"People do things like that. People you might think are decent, respectable types can do terrible things."

Getting ready for bed later, after a good hour of oppressive silence in the house, Ragsdale said, "It's murder. And murderers go to prison."

"Only because they're stupid and get caught. You never hear about the smart ones." She was at the wardrobe, choosing her outfit for tomorrow, laying it out efficiently to save time in the morning. "You said his wife died. He probably lives alone. We'll do everything right, we'll keep it simple and be done with him." She came up to Ragsdale and pushed him to shake him out of his daze. "We're only getting him before he gets us."

Ragsdale could have gone to the police himself. By reporting his fear of Fred Step he would rule out Barbie's plan. But he put it off, thinking there was not enough to tell the police yet. He decided to wait. A few days passed without his seeing Fred again. Then the phone call came to the office.

Ragsdale was in a briefing meeting with his agency team when the call came through. Fred sounded drunk and abusive. When Ragsdale finally put the phone down, Fred was talking as if he might be on his way up. Fortunately that didn't happen.

But when he told Barbie about it that night, she said, "That's it, we go ahead. And soon. When the new lawn takes it will be all the harder."

"I can't even conceive of us doing this."

"All you do is invite him home for supper. I'll do the rest."

The invitation could be spontaneous. The main thing was to get Step into the car and out to the house without anybody noticing. Ragsdale left the office early that evening so he would have time to hang around the entrance looking for Fred. Luck—if it could be called luck—was with him. Fred was loitering near the revolving doors.

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Ragsdale went to him this time. "Come on, Fred, let's talk this out. Come home with me and have dinner."

Fred's eyebrows went up. The cold eyes penetrated Ragsdale's at close range. But he saw nothing to add to his suspicion.

Since agreeing to bring Fred home, Ragsdale had seized on the idea that a friendly chat around the dinner table would solve everything. Fred would open up about whatever was bothering him. The Ragsdales would make amends somehow if, indeed, there had been some injustice in the past. They might end up saving Fred Step's life instead of taking it.

They were away from the office building, into the car and on the road home, before Ragsdale's colleagues hit the street. At the house Ragsdale drove quickly down the lane and parked by the side door through which he brought his guest, out of sight of everybody.

Barbie came in half an hour later while the two men were having their second drink. Her husband had put on one of his brass-band tapes. They were in their shirtsleeves, sitting on the edges of upholstered chairs, and there was a regimental air of formality about the place. She greeted Step, accepted a drink, and got busy setting the table. When it was ready, she called the men in and seated Step with his back to the swinging door separating the dining room from the kitchen.

Ragsdale could not imagine she had prepared a meal in this short time. He wanted to go in and talk to her, tell her that things were going quite well, but before he could move she was in the room again with three large glasses of vegetable juice on a tray. She set them out. "You two start," she said. "I've got something to attend to." She went away, the door thudding shut behind her.

Ragsdale tried to recapture the man-to-man atmosphere which had been developing before Barbie arrived home. "Would I have invited you here, Fred, if I didn't want to get to the bottom of this problem? I remember a party at somebody's house in Westmount. We were celebrating the Professor's anniversary. I drank a lot, so much that I woke up the next day with no recollection of the night before. This happens to me sometimes when I drink a lot, a kind of amnesia."

The calculating look came back across the table but with a little less hostility in it. "You don't remember bringing drinks to Cora? She wasn't used to so much liquor. And then taking her out into the garden? That's where I found the pair of you." Step frowned at the memory. "On one of those recliner chairs, the two of you."

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A door began to open in Ragsdale's mind. Cora Pendleton, that little cricket of a girl . . . The drinks had made her flirtatious, turned her into an exciting young woman. Good Lord, had he actually done that with her? She seemed no more than a child. "It's coming back," he said. "I'm starting to remember."

"You won't know the rest. You left the choir soon after. Cora came to me a couple of months later and said she was pregnant. I was the only man she could turn to—you had got married. I loved her, I was glad to marry her. So I did and we had some happiness until the time came for her to—" Step turned his face away.

"What happened?"

"She was so little. The baby turned out big—like you. She wanted to have it at home, so by the time the complications started and we tried to get her to a hospital, it was too late."

"Fred, I'm so sorry."

"Cora died. The baby did fine—an eleven-pound boy. He's still doing fine."

"You're raising him?"

"Like my own son."

Ragsdale was overwhelmed. What a staggering turn of events! Out of this misery, the frightening emergence of this enemy from the past, he had discovered that what he had always dreamed of was a reality. He had a son. His son was living somewhere in Montreal. Was it possible that Fred might consider . . .?

Ragsdale's thought was interrupted by the sudden opening of the kitchen door. Barbie was there holding in her hand the heavy, blunt carborundum bar Ragsdale used for sharpening garden tools. She took one pace forward, raising the bar in both hands, then brought it down on Step's skull with such force he heard the bone crack. Fred pitched forward, his face on the plate. There was little blood.

Barbie set down the bar. "Quickly now, help me." She went to the window, looked into the garden. "Perfect. It's just dark enough but we won't need a light."

"He was telling me what happened. I know now why he was after me."

"Beside the point, Ken. Move yourself."

Ragsdale got up and found himself taking the man's shoulders and dragging him into the kitchen while Barbie made attempts to lift his feet. She opened the back door and together they hefted him down the steps and onto the lawn.

While Barbie got a shovel from the shed, Ragsdale reached inside

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Step's jacket, found his wallet, tucked it inside his own pocket. He could not tell Barbie just yet about his son. He could not say he was going to go looking for the boy.

She came back. "What are you doing?"

Ragsdale made a pretense of pressing his hand on the body's chest. To his horror he felt a heartbeat. "He's still alive!"

"Also beside the point. Take this." She handed him the shovel, and bending down, tore away several sods exposing a six-foot patch of soft earth. "Dig."

They worked in silence and Barbie was right. The job was done in less than an hour—Step buried, the grass back in place, the excess earth distributed among the hydrangeas. Inside the house again, they washed and then sat at the kitchen table. The reaction set in and Ragsdale began to shake. She got the whisky bottle and poured him half a tumbler. "Drink it and go to bed. I'm going to get some work done."

He lay in bed, a little high from the liquor, thinking of what had happened, hearing the clatter of his wife's adding machine in the other room.

By morning his mind had done a job on the events of the previous night and all the days leading up to it so that Ragsdale could tell himself that everything might yet work out for the best. His son, wherever he was, could not be very well off with no mother and as strange a man as Fred Step for surrogate father. Now he would be available for adoption by his own flesh and blood. The boy would be the winner.

As for Fred, he was better off dead. His worries were over—no longer need he live with bitterness and dreams of revenge. But best of all, the Ragsdale family could now be complete without Barbie having to go through pregnancy.

It was not until he mentioned all this to his wife at breakfast that Ragsdale realized how far off base he was. "You're going to look up the baby? You crazy? That will connect you with the missing man."

"There's no reason for anybody to think we did anything to him."

"Who knows how one thing can lead to another? The only way for us to behave is as if we never heard of Fred Step."

Ragsdale sipped his coffee, feeling righteous determination welling up inside him. "Barbie," he said at last, "this is the son I've always wanted. I don't expect you to understand how I feel, but I've got to see him. I've got to have him."

"If they link you up with Step, I'm the one who will go to jail

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forever, not just you." Barbie showed him a benign smile. "It isn't going to happen."

They argued. She said he could not start phoning around to find out where Step lived. Ragsdale admitted he had kept back Step's wallet from the grave. He knew Fred's address. He was, in fact, going there today, staying home from work. He could not even wait for the weekend.

"Don't do it, Ken." She repeated her warning, calling it up the stairs. "Forget about your son. I mean it."

His answer was apparent in the clothes he was wearing when he came back down. No suit for the office; he had on slacks and sports shirt, his waist encircled by the trendy belt she had made for him with its dog-leash clip glittering on its chain.

She watched him get into his car and drive away. Then she locked the house and got into her own car and went after him. There was no need to stay on his rear bumper—she had looked in Step's wallet and memorized his address.

It was in a part of Montreal miles from the city center. The buildings were old and rundown. Barbie parked a few doors away from the block of apartments and looked around. Ken's car was not in sight. He could not have been and gone—he must have stopped off on the way. Probably to pick up a Teddy bear or a junior-size football. Her mouth turned down at the thought.

There was going to be no baby boy introduced into her house. Apart from the danger involved in coming close to the murdered man's existence, Barbie liked things the way they were. She could imagine Ken clearing out her office and using the room as a nursery. No way. Soon he would start pestering her for a little brother or sister to keep the child company. She would be badgered into getting pregnant or they would start making the rounds of the adoption agencies.

Almost an hour went by before Ragsdale showed up, emerging from the Metro station at the end of the road. Surprisingly clever. He had left his car in town and come by subway, taking care that his license plate would not be spotted outside the man's house.

He went inside and Barbie waited. He was not there long. When he came out, he crossed the street and went into another building. He came back outside quickly again but this time with a middle-aged woman carrying a sturdy boy. Ken asked her something and she handed the boy to him.

Barbie saw their faces close together; the resemblance was aston-

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ishing. Her husband's expression was radiant and she felt a twisting pain in her stomach that had never attacked her before. God, this was awful. What was happening to her? Was she going to go on feeling this way?

When Ken gave the boy back to the woman who went inside, Barbie got out of the car and followed her husband to the Metro station. She bought a ticket and overtook him on the platform. "Surprise, surprise," she said.

He turned to her. Happiness still dominated his face. "Good, you followed me. Did you see him?"

"Yes."

"Isn't he terrific? His name is Mark. Step pays that woman to look after him in the day. He takes him at nights and on weekends. Now that Fred is gone, I know I can work something out." Barbie was looking down the tunnel, watching for the approaching train. He went on talking to her back. "You don't mind too much, do you, love? I know it isn't what you wanted. But you'll be hooked on him, too."

With a rush of affection Ragsdale took the dog-leash attachment and clipped it onto a belt loop at the side of Barbie's slacks. She didn't seem to notice. It was just like the old days when they went everywhere chained together. "I bet after a while you'll want half a dozen kids of your own."

The train was approaching, a swaying light in the distance, a thundering sound in the tunnel. But despite the noise, Barbie still heard her husband's last words. Half a dozen kids of her own! She would rather be dead.

In the split second before the train burst into the station, she turned to Ken and gave him an abrupt push. As he staggered over the edge, she felt a firm tug at her side. Caught off balance, fastened by the chain, she went tumbling after him and they were struck by the front of the train before they reached the tracks, driven forward and down onto the electric rail, hearing hissing brakes, seeing flashing sparks, then darkness.

The police cleared the station. "They were fastened together," one commuter said to another as they climbed the steps to the street. "A suicide pact."

The other commuter was not impressed. It meant there would be no trains for at least an hour, so he was going to be stuck with a two-dollar cab fare. He could not guess what had been troubling the young lovers, nor did he care. He had problems of his own.

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**a *NEW* Henry H. Turnbuckle story by**

**JACK RITCHIE**

*Do you like stories about multiple murders? Do you relish looking for the pattern, the common denominator, the connecting link? Who among us—fan, devotee, aficionado—doesn't enjoy this 'tec theme? Well, here is one of the wackiest, one of the weirdest, one of the most fantastic series of murders you've ever encountered in mystery fiction, investigated by our old friend Detective Sergeant Henry H. Turnbuckle and his sidekick Ralph . . .*

# THE CONNECTING LINK

***by JACK RITCHIE***

I rubbed my hands. "I do so enjoy a good chain of murders."

"For shame, Henry."

"Now, Ralph, I didn't mean it that way. I have as much reverence for life as the most dedicated vegetarian. I meant that I enjoy the problem, the puzzle, the *challenge* presented by a connected series of murders."

There had been five of them so far and twelve teams of detectives were working on the case. Ralph and I now became the thirteenth. It was evident to me that the captain had been holding us in reserve, confident that if all others failed he could count on us.

Captain Williams now let us see the first letter.

> Dear Sirs:
>
> If you will send someone to 3186 N. Hopkins, apartment 26, you will find the body of one Alfred Cervantes. Last night, at approximately ten P.M., I shot him.
>
> During the course of nineteen days, I intend to murder five more people.
>
> 10/19/1

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"What is that 10/19/1 supposed to mean?" Ralph asked.

Captain Williams did not know. "We haven't been able to figure it out so far, but it's on every note."

Again Ralph pondered. "Why *nineteen* days? Why not ten or twenty or something even. Why nineteen?"

"It is the glove in our faces," I said grimly. "Meant to taunt us. And so is 10/19/1."

A squad car had been sent to the named address and the body of Alfred Cervantes, 36, had been discovered on the floor of his apartment.

Alfred Cervantes, a stone mason, had been a bachelor living alone. He had no known enemies.

The captain handed us the second note. It had been received three days after the first.

Dear Sirs:

You will find the body of Winfield Jackson in his apartment at 406 Mulberry. I shot him yesterday evening at eight o'clock.

Yes, I have decided to kill a total of six people. In a larger community I might have been able to make that as many as ten, but here I must limit myself to six.

I do not personally know any of my victims. I have no motive for killing any one of them—at least none that you *could understand.*

10/19/1

"Captain," I said significantly. "Just because he *says* that he has no standard motive is no reason why we must believe him. He could very well be hiding some perfectly legitimate motive for killing at least one or more of his victims and simply covering up by the use of multiplicity."

Captain Williams agreed. "We thought of that, Henry. In depth. But we still don't have anything."

Winfield Jackson, 52, a barber, had been a widower living alone. Investigation had not turned up anyone who might have wished him dead.

We read the third note.

Dear Sirs:

You will find Jerome Livingston dead in his apartment at 1908 East Wimberly. Apartment 47. I shot him at approximately nine thirty last evening.

I have told you that I do not know any of my victims

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personally and that is quite true. I have done only enough research to know that they will be available when I come to call.

I realize that simply murdering people without any motive and apparently helterskelter is rather unfair in this game. Therefore I now tell you that if there is no motive, at least there is a *pattern*—a definite pattern and I defy you to find it.

10/19/1

Ralph shook his head. "So he thinks this is all a game."

Jerome Livingston, 32, had been a bachelor and a chiropractor. Nothing significant tying him to the first two murders had been discovered.

The fourth letter came two days later.

Dear Sirs:

You will find Richard Newman dead in his apartment at 2981 Greenfield. Number 97. I shot him at about nine last evening.

My method of murder is simple and straightforward. I simply press the buzzer at my victim's door. When he answers, I shoot him. I have a silencer on my gun.

10/19/1

Richard Newman, 36, a grade-school teacher, had been separated from his wife and living alone.

Captain Williams picked up the fifth note. "This one came this morning."

"Ah, ha," I said, reaching. "Undoubtedly the fifth victim was single, a widower, or divorced, but certainly living alone in an apartment."

"No, Henry." Captain Williams handed me the note.

Dear Sirs:

I do not, of course, need to tell you where to find the body of my fifth victim. You already know.

How is the game going? Are you closing in or are you still blundering about? Have you done your research?

10/19/1

The fifth corpse had been that of George Rubens. He was married, had two grown children away from home, and lived in the lower half of a duplex which he owned. He was 62 at the time of his death and had been a lawyer.

Last night at about ten his front door buzzer had sounded and

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Rubens had gone to answer it. The killer had shot him as he opened the door. By the time Rubens' wife reached her husband's body, the killer had already fled into the night. She had phoned the police immediately.

Captain Williams leaned back in his chair. "Well, what do you make of it so far?"

Ralph thought he had something. "They were murdered in alphabetical order."

I considered that. "Even if that is so, Ralph, he's skipped quite a few letters. Besides, I don't believe that chain murderers resort to the alphabetical system any more." I turned to the captain and chided mildly. "Sir, you should have called us in sooner."

He stared at the ceiling. "I was saving you, Henry."

Just as I had thought. "I shall not fail you, Captain. Let me draw you a picture of our murderer. He is single, a widower, or divorced. My bet is single. He lives alone, though possibly with an aging parent or parents. If only one, it is probably his mother, since mothers as a rule live longer than fathers.

"I would say that he is fairly well educated, simply from the tone of his letters. I suspect that he has not done particularly well at his job, whatever that job is. He has probably not received the promotions he thinks he deserves. These murders are twisted protests against the circumstances of his life and a bid for recognition. He wants to show the world—and very likely prove to himself—that he has the stuff of which superior minds are made.

"I also suspect that he is in his fifties. He has reached that point in his life when he feels he must *do* something to even things up. When one is younger than fifty, one still harbors hope that things will change for the better. If one is sixty or older, one has already given up and cannot spare the energy required for violent protest."

Captain Williams seemed impressed. "Well, get to work on it, Henry. Tomorrow is the nineteenth day and victim number six is due."

He left Ralph and me with the detailed reports compiled by the other twelve teams working on the case, and we began to read.

When one searches for a connecting link in a series of murders, one cannot afford to overlook even minor items.

I thought I had something going when I discovered that the first four victims had seen military service. But then the fifth had not. Four of them had brown hair. But one had none at all. Four of them

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were Democrats. One was not. It went like that, with the role of the exception transferring from one victim to another.

By the time our shift ended at five, my head was reeling with facts, figures, and exceptions. The only consistency seemed to be that all the victims were males, all had telephones, and all were killed between the hours of eight and ten in the evening.

I went back to my apartment, made and ate my supper, and then sat down in my easy chair.

I proceeded to cogitate. Cervantes, Jackson, Livingston, Newman, Rubens. What could they all have had in common?

Well-known surnames for one thing. I rubbed my jaw. Was that possibly the key to the puzzle? Was our murderer disposing of people simply because they shared the same surnames with individuals who had made their mark in the world? Fantastic, but when one is dealing with a mad killer, one cannot afford to overlook the fantastic.

Or suppose, just *suppose*, that the present-day victims really had *nothing* in common themselves—*except* that they all shared the surnames of relatively famous individuals? Was it these exceptions and dead people who were actually linked together somehow?

What in the world could a mixed bag like that have in common? Cervantes, Jackson, Livingston, Newman, Rubens. They were not even contemporaries. Perhaps that could bear a little research.

I went to my set of the new Encyclopedia Britannica, the first ten volumes of which were for ready reference, the next nineteen for knowledge in depth, and the last single volume an outline of knowledge.

Ten, nineteen, one.

I blinked. *10/19/1?*

My eyes quickly went to the nineteen-volume section. Where would I find Cervantes? Ah, yes. Volume 3, which covered Bolivia to *Cervantes*. Cervantes' name was right there on the spine of the book.

Volume 10 caught my eyes. *Jackson* to Livestock. Also on the spine.

Volume 11. *Livingston* to Metalwork. On the spine again.

Newman? Yes. Volume 13. *Newman* to Peisistratus.

And Rubens? Volume 16. *Rubens* to Somalia.

My heart began to pound. The name of each of the five victims appeared on the spine of an encyclopedia volume. In plain sight.

An incredible coincidence? One name, yes. Perhaps even two. But *all five?* No. Never.

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So that was it.

Our murderer had selected the names of his victims from the backs of his encyclopedia set. And he had killed them in alphabetical order. Ralph had been right about that.

But there were *other* surnames on the backs of the encyclopedia set. I made a list of them. Aalto, a Finnish architect. Bolivar, the South American Liberator. Congreve, the dramatist. Hume, the philosopher. Peisistratus, the Greek ruler and tyrant. Why had our murderer skipped these names?

I reached for my telephone book and began paging. There was no Aalto listed. No Bolivar. No Congreve. The killer's words came to my mind. *I have decided to kill a total of six people. In a larger community I might have been able to make that as many as ten, but here I must limit myself to six.* They had been passed over for the very logical reason that they did not exist in our area.

I found a Hume listed. Only one. D. Hume. Why had he skipped Hume? Ah. Quite often women will list only their first initial or initials in the phone book to forestall nuisance or obscene calls. D. Hume was a Dorothy or a Doris or a Debbie and our murderer did not want to deviate from his basic pattern by killing a woman.

I could find no Peisistratus, which did not surprise me. I doubted if any larger community could provide one, except possibly Athens.

And where did all this bring me? To Volume 18. *Taylor* to Utah. Taylor was the next victim, unless—

Volume 19. Utilitarianism to Zwingli. What was Zwingli?—a tribe, a language, a person? I checked. A Swiss Protestant reformer.

I returned to the phone book. No Zwingli.

That settled it. *Taylor* was to be the sixth victim.

I immediately phoned Ralph and then Captain Williams. All three of us met twenty minutes later at headquarters, where I explained to them what I had so relentlessly deduced.

When I finished, they went off to consult the backs of a set of the Encyclopedia Britannica, which they eventually found in the sixth-floor jail library. While I waited for them to return, I did some more research in the telephone book.

When they came back, the captain reached for the phone book. He turned to the Taylors and estimated. "There are at least five hundred Taylors in the book."

"Five hundred and twenty-three," I said happily. "You could be living next to a Taylor and never know it."

"Whatever. The point is that we can't cover five hundred and

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twenty-three Taylors. The best we can do is to get in touch and tell them not to answer their doorbells tomorrow night."

"Captain," I offered. "The task of covering the Taylors can be considerably simplified if we just heed the murderer's pattern. Our Taylor will be single, or a widower, or separated from his wife, but in any case living alone in an apartment."

Ralph stirred. "Henry, the first four victims may have been men living alone in apartments, but the fifth, Rubens, was married and lived in a duplex."

Naturally I had the answer. "Ralph, there are only *three* Rubenses listed in our telephone book and two of those are women. The killer simply had to take what he could get and stay as close to his pattern as possible. In this case he sacrificed the residential requirement, but adhered to the gender. As it was, he was lucky that his first victim, Cervantes—of whom there are only four in this city—happened to be single and living in an apartment. Or perhaps that was what created the pattern in the first place."

I allowed myself a smile. "However, I do not think he is faced with any such problem as far as the Taylors are concerned. There are five hundred and twenty-three of them from whom to choose and I am certain that a fair number will be men living alone in apartments."

Captain Williams set the machinery in motion and by the time Ralph and I reported in for our shift the next morning there was a list.

"We narrowed it down to forty-two Taylors," Captain Williams said. "That still means calling in a lot of people to work overtime tonight, but let's hope it's for only one night."

He took a piece of paper out of a folder. "There's one other thing. We got another note from the killer."

I frowned. "You mean he's already killed his sixth man?"

"No, Henry. Not yet."

I read.

> Dear Sirs:
>
> Tonight I will dispose of my sixth and final victim.
>
> Have you discovered the link between my victims? To do so does not require encyclopedic knowledge. A surface glance is quite sufficient.
>
> 10/19/1

Captain Williams assigned Ralph and me to guard a Frederick C. Taylor. We arranged with him, for the sake of his safety, to spend the night with one of his relatives, and at six that evening Ralph

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and I let ourselves into his vacant apartment with the key he had provided and sat down to wait.

The time passed slowly, as it always does on stakeouts, and something nagged at my brain. That last note from the murderer. As far as my deductive powers were concerned, I had not needed it. It was merely a confirmation. I had got to the nitty-gritty of the case without its help.

The killer hadn't known that, of course. So he had sent the sixth note to the department and this time *before* he intended to commit the murder. Was he just being daring? Foolhardy? Or was it possible that he had *intentionally* given away enough information so that, even if I were not there, at least *someone* in the department would have been bound to figure out the encyclopedia connection and act accordingly?

And then I had it. But of course. The last trick up our murderer's sleeve.

I consulted my watch. Eight o'clock. Perhaps there was still time.

Ralph watched me pick up the apartment phone and dial headquarters. "Ralph," I explained, "while we are scattered about the city guarding a host of Taylors, our murderer is going about with a dirty smile on his face and stalking his sixth victim, who is in reality Zwingli."

"I thought you said there is no Zwingli."

"I found no Zwingli in the *telephone* book, Ralph, and the reason is obvious. Zwingli has an *unlisted* number known only to a few friends and somehow discovered by our murderer. However, Zwingli *should* be listed in our city directory."

Someone on the other end of the line finally picked up the phone. I identified myself and directed him to get a copy of the city directory and look up Zwingli's address. He put me on hold and returned a long ten minutes later. "There's no Zwingli listed."

I was a bit deflated and slowly cradled the phone. "No Zwingli, Ralph."

He nodded sympathetically. "There are days like that."

Nine o'clock came and went. So did ten. Ralph and I had been directed to remain in the apartment until at least midnight.

At eleven our phone rang.

It was Captain Williams. "Well, Henry, we got our murderer. Brophy and Atwell made the arrest. They were staked out in a utility closet where they could watch the door of Elmer Z. Taylor's apartment. Number 21. Just after ten o'clock they saw our man

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coming up the stairs with a gun in his hand and a dirty smile on his face. They waited until he pressed the buzzer before they jumped out and covered him. When he saw their guns he melted, and surrendered without a fight. He was so stunned to see them that he even confessed."

I smiled. "Ah, yes. Caught in the very act. Gun in hand and pressing the buzzer to Number 21."

"Not exactly, Henry."

"Not exactly?"

"No, Henry, he pressed the buzzer to apartment 27, down the hall."

I frowned. "He had the wrong apartment?"

"No, Henry. He had the right apartment. The victim he had in mind just wasn't named Taylor."

And then I had it. Again, but this time on target. But of course. Zwingli was not listed in either the directory *or* the telephone book for the very good reason that he was *new* to our metropolitan area. He hadn't been in the city long enough to be listed in either one of them.

I chuckled. "Captain, I'll wager a year's pay that I know the name of his intended victim. Zwingli, wasn't it?"

"No, Henry."

"No?"

"Utah. The man's last name is Utah."

The spine of Volume 18 flashed before my eyes. Taylor-*Utah*. But—

"John White Cloud Utah," Captain Williams said. "He's a Ute Indian who came east looking for work and he's now an apprentice brewmaster. There's one more thing, Henry."

There couldn't be. "What?"

"The murderer's name. It's Hume. David Hume."

Volume 8. Geraniales-*Hume*. How brazen could a killer get?

"He's 53, single, and living with his mother. He really doesn't have any personal motives for the murders. For now let's just say that the loser's life finally got to him and something snapped."

The captain continued mercilessly. "Of course Hume knew that his own surname was on the back of that encyclopedia, but it wasn't until he ran across John White Cloud Utah's name that he got the idea for his chain murders and the surprise ending. Hume is a clerk in the payroll department in the same brewery where Utah is taking his training."

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The captain was in an irritatingly good mood. "Like you said, Henry, you could be living next door to a Taylor—or nearly so—and never know it. Hume didn't know that Utah lived on his floor. Neither did Utah know that Hume lived down the hall. Yes, sir, Henry, we couldn't have caught our man without your help. You put us in the neighborhood. Now about that bet you just made—"

I hung up.

Ralph waited. He had been a party to only one side of the conversation and now I would have to fill him in. How could I possibly do it?

He studied *me* and then cleared his throat. "Let's go out and have a drink first, Henry."

I had two stiff sherrys before I could bring myself to tell him the whole story.

## DETECTIVERSE

### *FAKING IT*

*by MARGUERITE BURANELLI*

A self-proclaimed expert named Ray
Bought a fine "marble" statue one day.
But, oh, was he humbled
When his idol it crumbled.
'Twas only a cheap feat of clay.

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*He was the most expert headsman, the most skilled executioner, in all Christendom . . .*

# THE MASTER OF RINGSMARK

**by PHILIP JOHN STEAD**

The Executioner of Ringsmark considered the window above him without joy. It was a small window, and there were iron bars across it.

This was a sorry state of affairs: a Master Executioner, with forty years' lawful toil behind him in the skilled professional mystery of decapitation with the ax, not to mention several incidental experiences with the rack, the iron boot, the thumbscrew, and the wheel, and now he was shut up in a cell like a common criminal. It was a terrible thing for a Civil Servant of his status and experience.

In Ringsmark they did not shut people up to no purpose, either. The ruling Margrave was a man of blood and he did not burden his taxpayers with the maintenance of a large prison population. Had he not flogged his own son, Prince Karl, almost to death, in sight of the whole court, because he had caught him playing the violin? How, then, could the Margrave be merciful to rogues? Gaol in Ringsmark, in fact, spelled speedy release: either one went into the Margrave's army or one went straight to the scaffold.

The two alternatives were generally considered equally appalling, as the Margrave held strong views on military service. But there was no question of an alternative for the Executioner; he had been categorically sentenced to the block. It was a cruel thought that he would be executed by his own assistant, an inept young man, who had been known to make as many as twenty strokes before effecting a complete decapitation.

But what could one expect nowadays? The Margrave's servants were poorly paid, and the assistant was as good as could be got for the money. There were few craftsmen who loved their work as the Executioner did. Even he, however, knew the chill of penury, and when he had been given the chance to make a respectable sum of

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money on the side, he had taken it. He had had no reason to believe that his absence would be noticed or that he would be wanted to officiate in the square during that particular forty-eight hours. And he needed the money so badly.

The Executioner had a daughter, and the marriage of Executioners' children was always a problem for the parents. For who would marry the daughter of the man whom all the citizens held in such loathing that they would leave any tavern he entered and spit when he passed them in the street? The marriage alliances of the Executioners always took place within the ranks of their own profession, and it happened that the Executioner had recently had an offer for the girl from his colleague, the Master of Breslau. The money would have made up the sum for her dowry. Naturally he took the chance to earn it.

Perversely, though, during his absence, the Margrave's Judge had made a clean sweep of the gaol, and when the Executioner was needed to bring the business to a conclusion, neither he nor his ax could be found. Therefore the Judge had made out a warrant for his arrest and when he returned he found two grim familiars of the court drinking wine in his house. They confiscated the hard-earned money and incarcerated him immediately. Now it was only a matter of time.

The Executioner permitted himself the unusual luxury of thought. It was his habit not to think, and considering the frequency with which the Margrave called on him to perform his office, this was probably just as well. But now he thought about the elegant gentleman in the richly lined cloak and silk suit who had come to his house at midnight to make the offer to him. An honest, open-handed gentleman indeed, who had kissed his daughter and drunk to her mother's memory. A gentleman who had taken the precaution of coming in a mask, which he had kept on, reasonably enough, after all, considering the nature of his mission.

Private performances were by no means unknown to the Executioner. Sometimes the Margrave had required his services in cases in which it had been considered inexpedient for the issue to be clouded by judicial proceedings. There had been the moneylender to whom his Highness had owed an inconveniently large amount; there had been the narrow-minded and unpatriotic nobleman who had taken exception to the Margrave's gallantries with his wife. But even though these were secret executions, they were still matters of State. What the elegant gentleman who had come at midnight

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had proposed was of a different order. And how agreeably he had broached the matter.

"The Master of Ringsmark is famous all over Germany," he said, "as the most accomplished member of his distinguished profession."

"Your Excellency is too kind," rumbled the Executioner, wiping his enormous hands on his leather jerkin, "but you are not alone in the opinion. In fact, my esteemed colleague, the Master of Breslau, has just expressed a desire to betroth himself to my daughter."

It was then that the gentleman had mentioned that he might put the Executioner in the way of earning a hundred crowns—if the Executioner were not too busy.

"I have no engagements this week," admitted the Executioner.

"And if you do not mind a day's journey there and back," hazarded the gentleman. The Executioner confessed he had a passion for travel.

"And at the end of the journey, a hundred crowns," said the gentleman pleasantly, "provided you operate with your accustomed skill, and of course preserve complete discretion upon a subject to be supplied by my friends and me."

"I shall want more," the Executioner said, "if the subject has to be tortured as well."

An expression of disgust twisted the gentleman's handsome mouth. He flushed, and his hand clenched on the hilt of his sword.

"That will not be necessary," he said shortly.

The Master Executioner bowed, and his shining head, tonsured like a monk's, bobbed past the visitor's face.

"When does your Excellency require me to start on the journey?"

"Now," said the visitor. "A coach is waiting for us."

The Executioner opened a tall cupboard and took out the ax, with its broad moon blade.

"Ground yesterday," he said complacently, "after I dispatched the alderman who wouldn't pay his taxes." He wrapped a greasy cloth lovingly round the blade.

"At your Excellency's service," he said, bowing low. He bowed so low that he noticed that the visitor's shoe buckles were diamond, and it occurred to him that he might have asked more than a hundred crowns. But the Executioner was a man of his word.

The night was cold and starless. In the coach, the gentleman produced a dark cloth.

"My sole condition, Master Executioner," he said, "is that you

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must be blindfolded throughout both journeys." The Executioner submitted.

The coach lurched forward over the uneven cobbles.

"I suggest you go to sleep," came the gentleman's light voice. "We have far to go."

At their destination matters had been conducted with admirable efficiency. There was a room ready for the expert visitor, and a table set with ample meat and bread and wine. His employers were clearly men of understanding who did not expect good work to be done on an empty stomach.

As he ate and drank, locked in that little room, the Executioner had been visited by a qualm of fear. What if he were not suffered to return to Ringsmark when his task was accomplished? What if he were to be dispatched in turn? No one knew where he was, except those in whose power he lay. He did not know himself. He only knew that they had left the cobbled streets of the city and driven fast and far on bad uneven roads and through a forest, for he had heard the winter boughs cracking and groaning in the high wind, and occasionally low branches had swept against the coach windows. But he rejected this fear. If they wanted an executioner, it was because they were averse to shedding blood themselves; otherwise they would surely have carried out the execution on their own. He had nothing to fear.

The masked man unlocked the door and entered with a sconce of candles.

"We are ready," he said. "Do not delay."

The Executioner followed him into a large hall. Its stone columns had projecting iron rings, in which pine torches had been set. The eager heads of flame devoured the darkness, and the center of the hall was alive with leaping red and yellow light. Several people, men and women, all masked, stood motionless round a dais in the center.

The Executioner remembered an old story, often told at professional gatherings, of how many years ago a family tribunal had tried and condemned one of their own kin and sent secretly for a public headsman to conduct the execution. Apparently he was now about to officiate at such a ceremony. The story would surely be good enough to lessen the dowry required by his colleague at Breslau.

On the dais was a block. He examined it with an approving eye. It was hollowed perfectly; no room for the victim to make inconven-

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ient movements of the head. Against it leaned his familiar ax. He took it up, balanced it, and made a couple of swings to accustom himself to its weight.

Down the hall came a little procession, casting fantastic shadows on the stone floor as it advanced. First came a masked priest, reading his missal. Then, struggling furiously with two masked figures, one on either side, who were dragging him along, came a tall man.

The Executioner folded his bare arms conventionally, leaning them on the haft of his inverted ax. He wondered what it was that struck him as a little terrifying about the approaching victim. Then he realized.

The condemned man, whose shoulders were working so savagely, was silent. As they fought their way with him up the steps of the dais, the Executioner saw that besides being masked the man was gagged, too.

They forced the bound figure to the block and the Executioner gave calm orders. They soon had him kneeling with his head in the prescribed position, but he still struggled, silently and terribly. His legs jerked uncontrollably, the silk stockings were torn, the silk breeches unbuckled.

The Executioner's sense of decorum was affronted by this unreasonable and futile resistance. It had always pleased him to find that men generally met death on the scaffold with a dramatic sense of their own dignity. Even so, this unbecoming situation tonight was not beyond the craftsman's experience. He directed the burlier of the two attendants to sit on the victim's calves.

It seemed that speed was the essence of his mystery, so the Executioner nodded swiftly to the priest to stand clear, made sure that no imprudent person was standing behind him, fixed his eyes on an imaginary scarlet thread across the nape of the condemned man's neck, and swung the ax.

It was a masterstroke. The head fell cleanly severed; there was a sharp whistle of expelled air from the lungs. The Executioner noticed something odd again, and again realized what it was. No one had applauded.

But the gentleman in the mask, he with the diamond buckles, mounted the dais and put a bag of coins into his hands. The Executioner disengaged his ax and followed the stranger through the silent and motionless spectators out of the hall. He put on his jerkin in the little room where he had eaten, wrapped the blade in its cloth, and was blindfolded again. Then he was guided down the stone

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passages, and out into the pine-scented night air. A horse whimpered; the Executioner's feet stumbled on the coach step. The journey back to Ringsmark began.

The Judge, as was his way, had looked more with anger than sorrow upon this dereliction of duty. Nine prisoners for instant execution and the executioner nowhere to be found! Worse, no sign of the State ax! And confusion had been more confounded by the incompetence of the Assistant Executioner, for four of the condemned had died under his clumsy ministrations on the wheel before they could be got to the block.

The public had been disgusted and the Chancellor, who had offended his mistress by rising early to be present at the spectacle, which was usually a rewarding one, had given the Judge to understand that he had better exercise more control over the executive branch of his department if he did not wish to incur the Margrave's displeasure.

That was the last thing the Judge wished to do. He therefore sentenced the delinquent Executioner the moment he appeared before him, without complicating the matter by hearing evidence or permitting a defense. The crime was palpable; one of his own servants had exposed him to risking the Margrave's displeasure; nothing less than death could be adequate.

Thus the Executioner sat waiting for death.

No one had ever escaped from the Ringsmark Gaol. Once a gaoler had been corrupted by a prisoner's friends and had smuggled in a large file. The noise of the prisoner industriously filing had been heard, and the truth had come out. The Margrave had made the gaoler swallow the file, and since then no gaoler had ever spoken a word to a prisoner.

The Executioner thought of this and sighed. He clasped his huge knotted hands on his knees. It was cold and he was hungry. There had never been any question of pampering captives by feeding them.

He did not relish the prospect of being dispatched by his unsatisfactory assistant; it was an indignity. He derived a little gloomy satisfaction from the thought that the Judge would never get as good a Master Executioner again. But if he had not been so skilled, the mysterious gentleman would never have sent for him and got him into this unfortunate position.

Surely, the Executioner thought bitterly, it was no sin for a man to labor in his vocation? Merely because he was so expert, he had

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forfeited his secure position in the Civil Service, destroyed his daughter's hopes of marriage with the Master of Breslau, lost the hundred crowns, and was now about to lose his head.

The summit of his misery was reached when he heard a raucous voice echoing in the stone vaults of the gaol: "Make way for his Highness the Margrave!"

The Executioner got stiffly to his feet, which was difficult because of the heavy fetters. There was the rattle of arms, the grating of great keys, the clang of iron doors. It was just his accursed luck that his grim sovereign had chosen today to visit the gaol. His Highness always signalized these visits by ordering some refinement of torture for any prisoner in whose welfare he took a personal interest. At the thought of his hapless assistant trying to carry out such refinements, the Executioner could not repress a professional shudder.

The royal party halted outside the Executioner's cell; he was the only inmate of the gaol. The gaoler entered and knelt beside him. With his hammer he struck off the irons, nearly breaking bones as he did it. The Executioner was not pleased. When a man was unfettered, it was for the iron boot, the rack, and the wheel.

The Margrave came into the cell, the gold and enamel star blazing on his breast. The Executioner fell to his knees at his feet. Then he dared to raise his eyes.

"Prince Karl!" he breathed.

"My father is dead, Master Executioner," said the new Margrave. "A fatal accident at his hunting lodge in the forest. I pardon all prisoners today."

There was a dull metallic sound; the gaoler had put on the bench the confiscated bag of coins.

"Long live your Highness," whispered the Executioner, as his new sovereign turned and went out through the open door.

It was strange, he thought, that the diamond buckles he was wearing were exactly similar to those the masked gentleman had worn, but he was a loyal subject and the thought never visited him again.

"Q"

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**a *NEW* short story by**

**CLARK HOWARD**

*Tommy Kerry, a young American arrested south of the border, was lucky not to be incarcerated in Lecumberri, the second worst prison in Mexico. But in the oil fields of Mexico there are prisons without walls, without bars . . .*

*Clark Howard's "Horn Man" appeared in the June 2, 1980 issue of EQMM. The story was awarded the coveted Edgar by Mystery Writers of America as the best new mystery short story published in American magazines and books during 1980—a splendid honor and well deserved . . .*

# MEXICAN TRIANGLE

## *by CLARK HOWARD*

The men arrived at Villahermosa aboard a faded yellow bus that had once transported school children before it was phased out as being too antiquated and unsafe. The prison department took it over then, had some bars welded on the windows, and used it for a while to haul convicted men from the Mexico City courts out to Lecumberri Prison. But now that Pemex, the national petroleum company, had begun a pipeline operation in the state of Tabasco, the bus was used to transport *contratistas*—contract prison laborers—from Lecumberri down to the oil fields.

There were fourteen men in this latest shipment—twelve Mexican nationals and two *Norteamericanos*. When they got off the bus, they were lined up in front of a prefab field office. A Mexican police captain addressed them from the porch.

"You men have all volunteered to work in the government oil fields to earn a sentence reduction. All of you are serving two years

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or less for crimes of a non-violent nature. If you perform well in the fields, your respective sentences will be reduced by one half. In addition, you will receive sixty pesos a week for canteen supplies." Sixty pesos was about five dollars. It was better than nothing.

As the captain was speaking, two Anglos in work clothes came out onto the porch. They were sunburned, weathered men; thick-armed and thick-wristed; narrow-eyed from years of squinting; oil-field men. As the captain spoke, they studied the prisoners.

"Some of you might have volunteered for this job in order to escape," the captain continued. "If so, you will find it relatively easy to do. But when you are captured—as you probably will be—your original sentence will be doubled, and you will be required to serve it at Santa Marta Acatitla."

There was a wave of low muttering at the mention of Santa Marta. The federal prison just outside Mexico City was considered the country's worst hellhole. "I leave you now to Señor Waters, the field foreman, who will give you your labor assignments."

The captain retired to the shade of the field office and one of the Anglos stepped down off the porch. "My name's Glenn Waters," he said in Spanish. "I'm the field foreman. That gentleman there"—he nodded at the older, heavier Anglo—"is Mr. Clyde Madden, the field supervisor. First off, do either of you *Norteamericano* prisoners speak Spanish?"

A young man named Tommy Kerry raised his hand. Waters walked over to him. "What are you in for?"

"Smuggling."

"Smuggling what? Dope? Guns? Young girls? What?"

"Dope. Marijuana. I was down here on vacation and decided to take a kilo back with me. They caught me at the airport."

"What'd you get?"

"Two years."

"Any criminal record in the States?"

"No." Kerry shrugged as if embarrassed. "This was the first time I ever tried anything like, you know, criminal."

"Well, it only takes once, kid," Waters said tonelessly. "Step out of line and wait for me by the porch. The rest of you men turn left and follow me in single file."

Tommy Kerry waited by the porch. Clyde Madden, after staring at him for a minute, went back into the little field office with the captain. Kerry, hot and tired from the long bus ride, looked around, saw no one who could object, and sat down on the steps. He was

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twenty-six but had a baby face that made him look younger. Large dark eyes and soft, almost feminine lips made most women want to mother him. He had a reputation for being charming.

Waters returned in a little while and said, "Okay, kid, come with me." He led Tommy to a supply shack. "Give this man three sets of new khakis," he ordered the supply man. While the order was being filled, he said, "Kid, this must be your lucky day. You're going to work in Mr. Madden's house as a helper for his wife. The guy she had run off the other day. Got caught and shipped up to Santa Marta. Mrs. Madden don't speak Mex, so she needs somebody to talk to the help for her. You're it."

Kerry studied Glenn Waters as he talked. Waters was about forty, Kerry figured. A younger version of Clyde Madden: no belly yet, no red veins in his nose from too much tequila, no persistent rivulets of sweat down his neck. Not yet.

"Where you from, Mr. Waters?" Kerry asked as he was handed his khakis.

"Waco, Texas. Why?"

"I thought I recognized your drawl. I'm from Lubbock."

"Lubbock, huh? Good place to be *from*. What are you doing down here—besides smuggling pot, I mean."

Kerry shrugged. "I just got out of the army. Met this girl at a party and she invited me to come to Mexico with her and some of her friends. It sounded better than going back to Lubbock, so—"

"So you came along," Waters finished the story for him. "And when you got ready to go back, somebody suggested taking enough pot along to pay for the trip. You drew straws or rolled dice or something to see who'd carry it—"

"Cut cards."

"—and you were the lucky winner. But the marijuana dog was on duty at the airport that day and sniffed you out of line, right? So you got busted and your friends flew back home to the good old U.S. of A., leaving you holding the bag—or in your case, the kilo."

"Sounds like you've heard the story before."

"That one and a dozen others, kid." They left the supply shack and walked down the rutted dirt road. "I been working the fields for twenty years, kid, since I was younger than you. I've worked 'em in Texas, Oklahoma, Alaska, Iran, Kuwait, just about any place you can name that's got oil underneath it. And one thing I learned a long time ago: if a man's smart, he don't break no laws in no foreign country. Doing time is bad enough—but doing time in a foreign

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slammer is the pits. You're lucky you got this labor deal, otherwise you'd have to do your whole two years at Lecumberri. Things can get pretty rough on a *gringo* at *el Palacio Negro.*"

"At what?"

"*El Palacio Negro.* That's what they call Lecumberri—the Black Palace. Except for Santa Marta, it's the worst prison in Mexico. Nearly a hundred years old. Rat-infested. Built to hold 800 men—and it's got more than *two thousand* crammed into it. *Frijoles* and rice at every meal, every day. And if you get out of line they turn you over to a gun called *El Turko*, who used to work in one of them Istanbul prisons. They say *El Turko* is an expert at teaching prisoners how to behave properly."

"I guess I'm lucky to be out of there," Kerry said.

"Double lucky," said Waters. "Lucky not to be in Lecumberri, and lucky to get the job in Mr. Madden's house."

After Kerry cleaned up and dressed in a new set of khakis, Waters took him over to the Madden house. They went in through the back door and waited in the kitchen where two *campesinos*—local people—were cooking and cleaning. Presently Clyde Madden and his wife Lorna came in. Lorna was younger than Kerry expected, probably a couple of years under forty. Plain, angular, bony-hipped, she also had perfect calves and wide attractive shoulders.

Madden sat down at the table and hollered for two cold beers to be brought over for him and Waters. "All right, boy," he said to Kerry, "lemme tell you 'bout the kind of work them other cons on the bus with you's gonna be doing. They gonna be tarring our drilling pipe. For twelve hours a day they'll be working with boiling tar. So hot it'll burn your skin right off, so shiny black that it half blinds you, so stinking the smell of it stays in your nose permanent. We give 'em a ghost cream, a kind of white paste, to put on their faces to protect 'em from splatters, and we give 'em 'spestos gloves for their hands. That makes the job a little easier, but not much. The only thing that'll keep our drilling pipe from corroding is that hot tar when it dries. Putting it on is the worst job in the fields—that's why we give it to the cons. I want you to 'member all that when you're doing this nice clean work up here for my wife. Understan' me?"

"Yes, sir, I do," Kerry said. "I appreciate the job, sir." He glanced over at Lorna Madden. "I'll do everything I can to help Mrs. Madden." Their eyes met, held for an instant, parted.

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"There's three domestics," Madden said. "A cook, a cleaning woman, and a handyman. Miz Madden will give them their daily orders through you, an' you'll be responsible for seeing that ever'thing gets done. Keep your nose clean and stay in line, understan'?" Madden studied Kerry for a moment. "You ain't got no sex offenses on your record, have you?"

"No, sir," Kerry replied emphatically. "Not me, sir. Just dope smuggling, is all."

Madden got up and walked over to Lorna. "All yours, sweetie," he said, patting her on the rear. Kerry heard her say, "Clyde, please," and push his hand away.

"Let's go, Glenn. See you later, sweetie."

Madden and Waters left. Tommy Kerry remained standing next to the back door until finally Lorna looked over at him and said, "Well, come on over here and get yourself some coffee if you want to."

"Yes, ma'am. Thank you, ma'am."

Kerry came over to the stove. While the cook poured his coffee, he held out his hand to Lorna Madden. "It's nice to meet you, Mrs. Madden."

Lorna shook hands with him. Kerry held onto her hand for just a second longer than necessary. And they both knew it.

Kerry's work around the Madden household was easy enough. He translated to the three domestics whatever instructions Lorna Madden had for them; checked periodically throughout the day to make sure they were doing their jobs properly; and the rest of the time he just made himself generally useful. For a while he kept busy painting the outside trim around the windows, and the railing around the front porch. He stripped and stained a couple of old straightback chairs, making them look like new; and sanded the runners of two dresser drawers that stuck. He even put new shelves in the pantry and built vegetable and fruit bins under the bottom one.

"My, you *are* handy," Lorna praised. "Where in the world did you learn to do all those things?"

"My granddad, mostly," Kerry told her. "He raised me on his farm out in west Texas. When you grow up on a farm you pick up a lot about mending and building and fixing. Seemed like there was always something that needed repair."

Sometimes Lorna asked him to help with her flowers. She had a planter box outside every window and experimented with anything

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she thought might grow. "I'm always surprised when a new variety blooms," she admitted. "Sometimes I wonder how anything beautiful can flourish in this awful place."

"You don't like it here very much, do you?" Kerry asked.

"No, I'm afraid I don't. Not any more. I used to. When Mr. Madden first brought me here, why, this valley was one of the loveliest places you can imagine. It was a lush tropical landscape where all sorts of wildflowers and fern and ivy grew. And the little village was quiet and sleepy, just like on a picture postcard."

Lorna paused and looked past her front yard, at the sprawling oil field beyond. Her expression tightened. "Then the chainsaw operators came in—an army of them. They cut down everything in sight, everything that grew. After them came the bulldozers to shave off the stumps and leave the land flat. Then the diggers, the drillers, the pipelayers. They turned the village into a shantytown filled with cheap little cantinas and sleazy streetwalkers. They made the town square a litter dump of paper and plastic and aluminum cans. They brought in a caravan of peddlers selling digital watches, transistor radios, imitation Swiss Army knives, and a lot of other junk to keep the workers from getting home with their wages." She shook her head wryly. "All for the oil. The petroleum. The black gold. The Mexican crude."

"If you hate it so much, why do you stay?" Kerry asked.

Lorna answered softly, almost as if she were speaking to a slow child, "I'm thirty-eight years old, Tommy. I have been married to Mr. Madden since I was sixteen. For twenty-two years I've never been anything but his wife. I'm completely dependent on him for everything—the food I eat, the clothes on my back, the roof over my head. To answer your question, I stay because I have no choice. It's not easy. I have a bottle of sleeping pills in my bathroom. When I can't stand it any longer, I take two or three of them and go to sleep. It's not much of an escape, but it's the only one I've got."

Before Kerry could say anything further, they both noticed Clyde Madden's pickup coming down the road in front of a funnel of dust. They looked at each other for a moment, then Lorna sighed.

"You'd better get on around back. Mr. Madden wouldn't like us working together like this."

That night in the barracks Kerry asked his friend Paco, who bunked next to him, how far it was to the nearest U.S. border station.

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Paco laughed. "Oh, not so far, *amigo*. Only about eleven or twelve hundred kilometers."

"How far is that in miles?"

Paco shrugged. "I'm not sure. I think about seven hundred." His expression turned serious. "*Too* far, amigo," he said quietly.

Kerry was lying on his bunk. As usual he tried not to breathe too deeply because of the pervading smell of petroleum in the air. It was a constant thing, that smell; it got into a man's nostrils and mouth, throat and lungs; you could taste it with every word spoken or every bite taken. The only time Kerry ever got away from it was in the air-conditioned cleanness of the Madden house.

Getting up, Kerry stuck his head out the glassless window to see if there was any breeze outside. There was not. All he got was a breath of night air thick with the fumes of natural gas burnoff from the wellheads. In the distance the otherwise dark sky had an orange glow from the burning. As Kerry stared at the glow, he saw above it in the black upper sky a minute light moving slowly from south to north. A plane. Turning, he sat on the edge of Paco's bunk.

"How far to the nearest commercial airport?"

Paco thought for a moment. "I think that would be Gutierrez. It's about a two-hour drive south."

"Good road?"

"Narrow," said Paco, "but paved all the way."

"Do you know where they have air service to?"

"Mexico City. Maybe Vera Cruz and Campeche, I don't know."

"But Mexico City for sure?"

"*Sí*. That's the one place you can always get to. But listen, *amigo*, you'd be a fool to try it. A *gringo* like you, all alone—"

"Maybe I won't be alone," Kerry murmured.

The next time Kerry was helping Lorna Madden with her flowers, he said matter-of-factly, "I've decided to escape, Lorna."

She stared at him incredulously; he was not sure whether it was because he had told her he intended to run, or because he had called her by her given name.

"You're crazy," she said after a few moments.

"Maybe I am. But I'm going to try anyway. I've made up my mind."

"If they catch you, you'll get put back in prison with a double sentence."

"*If* they catch me."

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"They catch nearly everybody that runs. The few who do make it are Mexes. No white man has ever escaped from these fields."

Kerry shrugged. "Maybe I'll be the first. Anyway, if I do get caught, it'll still be better than being here." Seeing a frown come to Lorna's face, Kerry quickly took her hand. "I didn't mean that the way it sounded. It's wonderful being here with you. You're the only good thing that's happened to me since I got out of the army and came down to this damned country. But I've begun to feel about these oil fields as you do; I've begun to hate them as you do. The smell of petroleum, the dust, the ugliness. Then there's—well, never mind, that's no concern of yours—"

"What?" she asked, squeezing his hand. "I want to know."

Kerry looked away, refusing to meet her eyes. "The Mexes in the barracks are jealous because I've got such an easy job. They—they've been talking about ganging up some night and dragging me into the shower room. I don't know how much of it is just talk—" He shrugged and still did not look at her.

"My God," Lorna said softly.

They stood in silence for a little while, their hands still together; it was her holding his hand now—the older woman comforting the younger man. He seemed so vulnerable with his large dark eyes and soft, almost feminine lips. Lorna thought about the shower room and shuddered.

"Come on in the kitchen," she said. "Let's have some coffee and think this out."

The cook had gone to the market and the cleaning woman was upstairs, so they had the kitchen to themselves. Lorna brought in a bottle of Clyde Madden's brandy and laced their coffee.

"I want you to help me, Lorna," Kerry said. "I won't ask you to do anything that would involve you directly, that would get you into any kind of trouble, but I'd like to be able to count on you for a little information."

"What kind of information, Tommy?"

Their eyes held for a moment. There was something about the way she said his name.

"It would be a big help if I knew when Madden was going to be away for the day—so I could get a good headstart before I was missed. And I'd appreciate knowing the shortest way across the fields to the road to Gutierrez."

"Gutierrez? You're making for the airport then?"

"Yes. I'm going to try and stow away on a cargo plane. I found out

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that the drums of barite drilling mud are flown in from south Texas and then trucked up here. The empty barrels are flown back to Texas. I figure if I can slip onto one of those return planes—"

"How do you plan to get to the airport? It's a hundred miles."

"I'll hitchhike."

"That's crazy—a white man hitchhiking on a Mexican highway. How far do you think you'd get?"

"I'm going to steal some wet coffee grounds from your kitchen and darken my face. I think I'll have a good chance."

Lorna shook her head. "You won't get twenty miles."

Kerry shrugged. "Maybe not. But I'm going to try. I've *got* to try."

From outside came the sound of Clyde Maden's pickup again. Lorna quickly took their cups to the sink and rinsed them. Kerry started out the back way. When he got to the door, Lorna's voice stopped him.

"Tommy?"

Kerry looked back at her.

"I'll help you," she said. "We'll do it together."

Kerry nodded. As he went out the back door, he smiled a knowing smile.

That evening, as Kerry was walking down the road that led to his barracks, Glenn Waters pulled up alongside him in a company Jeep. "Hop in," he said. Kerry climbed into the passenger seat. Waters threw him an unsmiling look. "You sure put one over on me, didn't you, kid?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Like hell you don't. Lecumberri Prison sent me a copy of your record today. The Texas authorities tracked you down here and put an extradition hold on you. You're an escapee from Huntsville and you've got a record as long as my arm."

Kerry fished a cigarette out of his shirt pocket and lighted it. "What do you figure to do about it?"

"I haven't decided yet," Waters replied.

Kerry smiled the same kind of knowing smile again. "While you're making up your mind, you'd better be thinking about how Mr. Madden's going to feel when *he* finds out about my record. We both know how particular he is about who you pick to work in his house. I don't imagine that he's going to be too pleased that you let me work around his wife for two months—especially with that rape conviction I've got. Could cost you your job."

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Waters pulled over to the side of the road and parked. "Pretty smart, aren't you, kid? I didn't know they grew 'em that smart in Lubbock."

"Just a shade smarter than they grow 'em in Waco," Kerry said. He locked eyes with Waters. "Do we make a deal or do we butt heads?"

"What kind of deal did you have in mind?"

"I want out of here."

Waters shook his head emphatically. "If I got caught helping you escape, *I'd* end up in Santa Marta prison. No, thanks. I'd rather lose my job."

"You don't have to get directly involved," Kerry assured him. "I already have a plan. All I need from you is capital. If you could arrange to leave some money where I'd find it—"

"How much money?"

"A thousand dollars."

Again the emphatic shake of the head. "I don't have that much—and you don't *need* that much. I'll give you five hundred. Take it or leave it."

Kerry quickly nodded. "It's a deal. But I'll need one other thing—a company ID badge to get out the gate. An old one will do—one turned in by an ex-employee."

"Okay. But that's all. And I don't want to know any of the details—not how or when or anything. Understood?"

"Understood."

They worked out a plan. On the next payday Waters would get three hundred in U.S. dollars and two hundred in Mexican pesos, and leave the money and the ID badge in a manila envelope under a drainage pipe at the side of the road. Kerry would pick it up on his way to work.

Kerry told Lorna he would be ready to go anytime after payday. "A couple of guys owe me a few dollars. I want to collect before I go."

"That'll be perfect," said Lorna. "The day after payday Clyde will be gone all day. He has to drive over to the west field and inspect the new rigs that just went up. It's a three-hour drive each way. If we leave thirty minutes after he does, we can get to the airport in Gutierrez and be on a plane for Mexico City before—"

"We?" Kerry interrupted.

"Yes," Lorna said firmly. "I'm going with you." She took hold of his arm with both hands. "Look, I know I'm twelve years older than

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you, and not very pretty either, so I don't expect you to stay with me. But if we could just help each other get out of here, and maybe stay together until I can find some kind of work—"

"I'll stay with you," Kerry promised. "And I'll take care of you."

"Tommy, don't say that if you don't mean it. I'm so scared of being alone—"

"You won't be alone," he told her. "Stop worrying. Tell me how you want to do it."

Lorna composed herself. "Clyde will be taking Glenn Waters, his field foreman, with him. They usually take Glenn's Jeep because it does better on the field roads. Clyde's pickup will be left here. As soon as they leave, I'll pack my clothes, take all the household money, and be ready to go. You can come in and put on some of Clyde's clothes—they'll be a little big but you can get by. Then you can hide under a tarp in the back of the truck until we get past the gate and out to the Gutierrez highway. It should work all right." She looked quizzically at him. "Shouldn't it?"

"Yeah," Kerry said. "It should work just fine."

On the day after payday Kerry was washing windows at the back of the house when Glenn Waters drove up and parked his Jeep next to Clyde Madden's pickup. On his way into the house Waters paused and looked inquiringly at Kerry. The young convict nodded almost imperceptibly, just enough to let Waters know that he had picked up the manila envelope with the money and the ID badge. The envelope was tucked neatly under his khaki shirt.

Waters knocked and went into the kitchen. A few minutes later he came back out, accompanied by Clyde Madden. The two of them got into the Jeep. Neither man even glanced at Kerry as they drove away.

Kerry continued to wash the windows for several minutes, and then the cook and the cleaning woman emerged from the house and started toward the company store on errands. The handyman was already gone—Kerry had sent him over to the carpenter shop to get a chair leg repaired.

When he was certain no one was around, Kerry went into the house. Lorna was at the breakfast corner, nervously sipping coffee. "Everyone's gone," Kerry said. "Let's get moving."

Lorna put down her cup and swallowed hard. "Upstairs," she said. "Everything's ready."

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As they left the kitchen, Kerry slipped a carving knife from the wall holder and held it concealed at his side.

Lorna led the way to the master bedroom. From the closet she handed Kerry some clothes. "These are some things Clyde wore a few years ago when he wasn't so heavy. They'll probably fit you better." Then she saw the knife in his hand. "Why do you have that?" she asked.

Kerry didn't answer. Instead he asked, "Where's the household money?"

"It's in the bureau."

"Get it." Kerry put down the knife and undressed to change clothes. He watched Lorna closely as she got a roll of bills from the bureau.

"You're not taking me, are you?" Lorna asked quietly.

"You guessed it, lady."

"I thought we were going to help each other."

"You were only half right." He took the money from her hand and began counting it.

"You need me to get out the gate," she said.

"I don't need you for anything. All I need is that pickup out there." He put the money on a chair with the manila envelope and the knife. Then he had a sudden thought. His eyes swept down to Lorna's perfect calves. Wetting his lips, he glanced at the clock. "On second thought, maybe I do need you for something—"

Stepping over to Lorna, Kerry put both hands on the front of her dress and ripped it open.

"Just hold it right there, punk," said Glenn Waters from the bedroom door. Kerry whirled around and froze. Waters had a pistol leveled at his chest. "Back up against the wall," he ordered.

Lorna hurried over to Waters. "I was afraid you weren't going to make it in time."

"Everything's right on schedule, honey," he said, kissing her briefly on the cheek. "But this next part is going to be hard."

Lorna took a step away from him. "Do it, Glenn," she said determinedly.

Waters hesitated.

"Do it!" Lorna ordered.

Waters shifted the gun to his left hand, closed his right fist, and punched her solidly in the jaw. Lorna dropped to the floor in a heap.

Kerry stared incredulously at Glenn Waters. "What the hell's going on, man?"

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Waters gave him a slight smile. "Seems there was an escape attempt this morning," he said matter-of-factly. "The convict assigned to Supervisor Madden's house. The supervisor and I had started out for the west field when he noticed he'd forgotten his inspection log. We drove back to get it. Madden came inside and caught you attacking his wife. There was a struggle and you stuck that kitchen knife in him. His wife ran upstairs. You caught her in the bedroom. I was waiting in the Jeep outside and heard her yell just before you slugged her. I got my pistol out of the utility chest and came inside. You rushed me with the knife and—" Waters shrugged.

Kerry's eyes narrowed. "So it's been you and her all along."

"You got that right, kid. Me and her and old Clyde's company insurance policy. You know that Pemex insures its field supervisors for two hundred thousand?"

"Where's Madden now?"

"Lying on the kitchen floor where I left him, dead to the world. Lorna put six of her sleeping pills in his coffee this morning." He smiled. "It won't matter though, because there won't be an autopsy; not in a stabbing death, not out here. I'll finish him off later."

On the floor, Lorna rolled over and groaned. Glenn Waters looked down at her, taking his eyes off Kerry for a split-second. But that split-second was long enough. Kerry snatched a lamp from the bedtable and hurled it in Glenn's face, knocking him backward. Then he leaped across the bed for the knife on the chair. Desperately his fingers closed on the handle. Turning, he saw Waters on the floor, groping for his fallen gun. Kerry dove on him with the knife just as Waters rolled over and pulled the trigger.

Glenn Waters' bullet drilled Tommy Kerry in the center of the forehead, and Tommy Kerry's knife plunged directly into Glenn Waters' heart.

When Lorna woke up, it was not difficult for her to figure out what had happened.

Men, she thought. They couldn't be depended on to do anything right.

Quickly she revised her story. Clyde came back for his inspection log and caught Kerry attacking her. There was a struggle in the kitchen and Kerry stabbed Clyde. She ran upstairs. Kerry followed her, ripped her dress, punched her in the face—

Gently she touched her swelling jaw. At least you did that right, Glenn.

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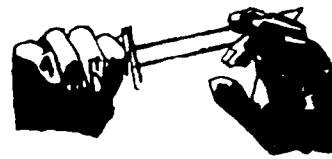
—anyway, Glenn came running into the bedroom with the gun. Kerry stabbed Glenn, and Glenn shot Kerry.

Lorna pursed her lips. Yes, that sounded fine. She looked around the room. Everything was perfect—except for one last little detail. She wet her lips. This was something she had not counted on. She wondered if she could do it.

Glancing out the window, she saw the barren, brown oil field in all its ugliness. She thought of the twenty-two years she had spent with Clyde. And she thought of freedom. Freedom and two hundred thousand dollars.

Lorna smiled. She could do it, all right.

Wrapping the knife handle with a handkerchief, she pulled it out of Glenn's chest and went down to the kitchen.



## DETECTIVERSE

### *ESCAPE*

*by CLARE DAVIS*

Two convicts named Bowers and Bale
Decided to bust out of jail.
After a while
They went piggy-back style,
And Bowers got out on Bale.

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## DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

*This is the 585th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . Thatcher Pike told his art students over and over: "Look carefully, then paint what you see" . . .*

*The author, Anita Buck, is in her mid-fifties, married, and the mother of two daughters. She has been a copy writer for a small radio station (WAVN, Stillwater, Minnesota) and the family-page editor for the* Stillwater Daily Gazette. *Her hobbies include cross-country skiing, canoeing, swimming, hiking, and reading, and recently she has taken up watercolor painting. A week spent at an art colony in Grand Marais, Minnesota, was the inspiration for her first fiction . . .*

# THE WAY YOU SEE IT

**by ANITA BUCK**

Thatcher Pike squinted across sun-dimpled water at the fish houses lining the cove at Portage Bay, Minnesota. He took preliminary measurements with the handle of his paint brush, then made a few practise swings across the blank paper in front of him.

He turned to the class assembled on the dock. "Now what am I going to do? I'm not going to paint fish houses. I'm not going to paint water. I'm going to paint a picture, heh?" He grinned at the group, his blue eyes twinkling behind miniature glasses perched impudently on the bridge of his bulbous nose.

"We're trying to tell the viewer what we see. So we observe very carefully"—he measured again—"and we paint what we see." He made a few trial passes across the paper. "Okay," said Thatcher, "now we'll begin."

The class watched as Thatcher mixed a variety of colors.

Portage Bay lies like a bracelet around a harbor on Lake Superior. A rise of hills behind the town shines like emeralds, giving a promise

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of the wilderness beyond. The town is the main departure point for canoeists and backpackers who travel the wild country which still lies along the Minnesota-Canada border.

A Coast Guard station stands on a point at the north end of town, its lighthouse blinking notice of the channel between the arms of the bay. Gulls wheel and scream, following fishing trawlers and charter boats, in hope of salvaging a meal. Portage Bay swells to triple its population when summer tourists invade the picturesque area.

"All right. Let's see what happens." Thatcher squeezed the surplus paint from his brush and swung it across the paper. In moments a fish house took form.

"Now what do we see? A lot of darks here"—he daubed the brush under the eaves—"and here"—the shadow of the dock appeared—"and here." Thatcher stroked in the heavy shadow alongside the shed.

He painted twenty minutes longer, then stepped back from the painting. "Well, that's enough. Now it's your turn." He faced the class. "Any questions? No? Then off you go. Be sure to sign out where you'll be so I can find you."

The students clustered around the clipboard, deciding on which of the several favorite spots they would paint that day.

Thatcher Pike packed up his painting gear, then stowed it methodically in the back of his ancient station wagon.

While waiting for the clipboard, Thatcher pulled off his decrepit fishing cap and scratched his head, leaving spikes of gray hair poking out at every angle. Bushy eyebrows flecked with gray bridged a round nose. A scraggly mustache drooped over a Puckish mouth, giving Thatcher the appearance of a benevolent walrus. He routinely wore a plaid shirt, brown loafers, and khaki pants which hung low on his hips, pushed out in front by a sagging belly. When he moved, Pike's spirited gait belied his 70 years.

Thatcher settled the cap in place and sighed. The single soft-boiled egg, lone piece of unbuttered whole wheat toast, and solitary cup of black coffee that his wife Angie served him for breakfast left a hollow in his stomach.

When he received the clipboard, Thatcher waved goodbye, called out, "See you later. Good painting," and started the station wagon. He headed through town to Lacey's Café, parked in front, and pushed open the door.

A voice hailed him. "Over here, Thatcher. I saved you a place."

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Pike joined the police chief at a corner table. "Morning, Herman." He eased into a chair and signaled Betsy. "The usual."

Betsy brought Thatcher a king-sized mug of steaming cocoa, topped with whipped cream. She set a plate of doughnuts on the table.

Herman and Thatcher matched for the check. Thatcher shoved it across the table. "Sorry, Herman. I win again." He stirred the whipped cream into the cocoa, took a big sip, and reached for a doughnut.

"What's new at the art colony?" asked the policeman. "Looks like a new bunch of painters in town."

"Yes, fifteen this week. A nice turnout." Thatcher finished his first doughnut and reached for a second. "What's new in the world of crime? More complaints about the seagulls dirtying the roof of the gift shop? Some tourist park the wrong way on the one-way street?"

Herman chuckled. "That's a pretty fair description of my work. Except today." He stirred his coffee.

"Well?" Thatcher waited expectantly.

"Funny thing. The Coast Guard contacted my office early this morning. Seems the government was testing a new device, some kind of sonar compass, on one of the big ships, the Athena. They particularly chose the Great Lakes because there are so many things that could interfere with its operation."

Thatcher nodded. "Other ships, iron ore, narrow channels, hundreds of fishing and pleasure boats, all with electronic stuff on them."

"Right. Well, last night the Athena tied up at Thunder Bay. American ship in Canadian waters. Rather routine. Except that this morning the new sonar compass was missing."

Thatcher perked up. "Sounds like it could become an international incident, heh?"

"There's that possibility. We've been alerted. The state highway patrol is involved. The Coast Guard has boats out. But I don't expect much. The theft must have been carefully planned. Very few people even knew which boat it was on."

"Have to get the compass back across the border, back here, to dispose of it. Nothing north into Canada except more pine trees."

"That's the way I figure it. But the thief won't cross the border by land. Customs always checks carefully, and today they'll be opening packets of razor blades in their search."

Thatcher finished his cocoa. "Must have come back by boat."

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"That's the way we figure it, but which boat? Ore boats, fishing trawlers, sailboats, cruisers—how do we check them all?"

"Well, Herman, you have your work cut out for you today. So do I. Thanks for the doughnuts." Thatcher shoved back his chair and waved his way out of the restaurant.

Thatcher returned to the cove. The students clustered about him as he approached the first canvas, then flocked after him as he moved from easel to easel, making critical comments.

"That's nice. I like this fisherman. The touch of his red jacket livens up this corner. Hmm." Thatcher studied a picture. "Perhaps you'll want to soften the edge of the roof here, and here. See how the sunlight makes that edge disappear? Look at it carefully, and paint it the way you see it."

The cluster moved to the next easel. "A good composition," complimented Thatcher.

"I made about four sketches before I started to paint," said the student.

"Good idea. It paid off. I like the contrast of the open door nice and black against the sunlit boards."

Thatcher studied the next painting. "Nice repetition in the empty slips. Interesting contrast between the weathered boat in drydock and the lone boat in the last slip."

Thatcher finished his critique, then slid behind the wheel of his station wagon.

"Next stop—hmm, let's see." He consulted the clipboard. "I'll head for Hidden Falls. One, two, three—six of them down there."

Thatcher traveled the three miles south of town. As he signaled a left turn to the parking lot at Hidden Falls, the Duluth-Thunder Bay bus approached from the opposite direction. Thatcher waited for the bus to pass, then turned in and parked. He headed down the trail, and repeated the performance at the cove, commenting, encouraging, instructing.

When he finished, Thatcher reminded the students, "Don't forget to eat. I'll see you back at the studio about four o'clock, heh?"

Thatcher consulted the clipboard. One more stop, just north of town. "Well, that's a nice drive. I'll still be home on time for lunch."

He pulled onto the shoulder of the road and approached the lone artist.

"How's it going?"

He looked up at Thatcher. "Not too well. I did a painting of the

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Mission church, then decided to try the road with the fireweed, and the dark pines behind. I'm not too happy with it."

"Let's take a look." Thatcher slid onto the stool vacated by the student. "Hmm. Your perspective is good. I'm not sure about this figure, though. What do you think?"

"I just put him in a little while ago. He came walking along, so I put him in. Thought it might add life to the picture."

"You've got him pretty well, but what's he carrying?"

"A canvas bag."

"And what was in the canvas bag?"

"How do I know?"

"What did you see? Was it soft, as if it was full of clothing? Was it lumpy as if it was filled with cans of groceries? Was it heavy? What did you see?"

The student thought a minute. "I guess it was heavy, and poked out as if there was something hard in it, like this." He sketched the bag on a scratch pad.

Thatcher beamed. "There you have it. Put that heavy bag in the man's hand and you bring him to life. Make him lean a little with its weight. Pick up a little of the red in his jacket over here"—Thatcher pointed—"and the whole picture will hang together."

"Thanks. I'll try that."

"You going to eat lunch?"

"Yeah. I brought a sandwich with me."

"Then I'll see you later at the studio."

Thatcher turned the station wagon back toward town. He drove past the cove and spotted art students gathered at the end of the dock, unwrapping newspaper packages. Thatcher knew it was fish fresh from the smokehouse. He smacked his lips, imagining the pop and fizz that greeted the pull of tabs on icy cans of beer. He sighed, and turned up the hill toward home.

Thatcher entered the front door and hung his cap on a hat rack. "Angie, I'm home."

"Out here, dear.

Thatcher followed her voice to the rear of the house.

"Did you have a good morning, Thatcher?" Angie bustled about setting lunch on the table.

"Yes, yes. A nice group. And a beautiful day." He surveyed the lunch table. Pale yellow cloth matched the color of a single perfect rose curving out of a clear glass vase. Green napkins accented crisp greens on glass plates. Red salt and pepper shakers echoed the bright

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tomatoes in the salad. Dollops of low-calorie cheese completed the color scheme.

Thatcher took up his fork thinking, "I could use a little more food and a little less artistic arrangement." He smiled at Angie. "Pretty table, my dear."

"Thank you, Thatcher. Anything new in town?"

"Why, yes. Herman has a real case to work on." Thatcher told her of the theft of the sonar compass. Shortly, he pushed back his chair. "Well, I'm going down to the studio for a while." He deposited a kiss on Angie's upturned cheek, and headed back downtown.

Thatcher set up his easel and studied the painting he had started that morning. Now to add the finishing touches. Thatcher mixed colors and painted. His work slowed as his attention wandered to Herman and the missing compass.

Suddenly Thatcher grabbed a piece of paper. He sketched a few lines, paused, sketched again. "Closed door there, open door there." He stared at the drawing. "Hmm." He drew again. "Bright jacket once, bright jacket again." He scrutinized his drawing. "Two boats out of service." He pushed his hat to the back of his head and scratched his scalp.

"Aha." A few quick steps brought Thatcher to the phone. He dialed quickly.

"Police station."

"Herman, this is Thatcher. If I were you I'd drive up north of town to the Shady Rest Cabins. Check to see if a single man is registered there. Probably came in early this morning."

"What are you talking about, Thatcher?"

"You want to find that compass?"

"You bet I do."

"Then listen to me. Check the Shady Rest. But, Herman, be sure to get there before three o'clock. And then you might want to take one of your Coast Guard friends and drop by Sam Higgins' house. Ask him where he was last night."

"Sam Higgins? Well, if you say so, Thatcher. Anything else?"

Thatcher thought a minute. "No. Oh, yes. Thanks for the doughnuts this morning." His chuckle was answered by the buzz of a dead phone.

Thatcher turned to his painting, worked until the students began straggling in shortly before four o'clock. They displayed their paintings around the walls of the studio. Hands clasped behind his back,

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Thatcher inspected them. Just as he finished his criticisms, the police chief appeared in the doorway.

Thatcher looked up and beckoned Herman into the studio. Turning to his students, he said, "I'll see you all in the morning. Leave your paintings here until tomorrow, heh?"

The students left. Thatcher turned to the chief. "Now, Herman. What can I do for you?"

"You know why I'm here, you old goat. We caught the thief, with the sonar compass in his room at the Shady Rest. And we picked up Sam Higgins. Poor guy was scared to death at the sight of the Coast Guard. Told us right off that he'd been offered a wad of money for a night run to pick up a sailor off the Athena." Herman strolled around the studio, eyeing the paintings. "I can't figure out how you knew it, Thatcher. What's your secret?"

"Very simple. As I tell my students, look very carefully, then paint what you see." He motioned to the policeman. "Look at this exhibit of today's work."

Thatcher pointed to the first picture. "What do you see?"

"Looks like Sam Higgins' fish house."

"Right. Higgins' fish house with the door closed. And a man fishing off the rocks nearby." Thatcher turned to Herman. "Who fishes off the rocks in the morning? Everyone knows the fish bite out along the point in the morning."

Thatcher turned to the next water color. "Here is a later scene. The fisherman is gone, and the door to Higgins' fish house is open." He resettled his hat. "Maybe somebody slipped in to remove something, heh, and forgot to close the door."

Thatcher moved to another painting. "What have we here? Empty slips except for one. And a boat in drydock." He turned to Herman. "A boat in drydock isn't making money. A boat in the slip isn't making money—it isn't chartered for the day. Why not?" Thatcher grinned. "Perhaps the owner, Sam Higgins, just came in from a long all-night trip, heh?"

Thatcher passed several canvases and pointed to the scene of the road lined with fireweed. "Here we have a roadway, trees, flowers, and a lone man walking along the road. Where's he going? Perhaps to the shabby tourist cabins where you can get a room any time night or day without reservations."

The lawman nodded. "And he's carrying a bag containing something heavy, something big and heavy."

Thatcher beamed at Herman. "You're using your eyes."

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"So that's our sailor with the missing compass. Sam Higgins brought him across the border by water."

Thatcher agreed, "And that's how the case was solved."

"But why did you tell me to pick him up before three o'clock?"

"Very simple." Thatcher pointed to the canvases painted at Hidden Falls. "The bus from Duluth was on its way to Thunder Bay this morning just as I got to the Falls. I remembered that the afternoon bus from Thunder Bay comes through town just after three o'clock. It's already been inspected at customs. The sailor boards the bus with the compass and rides to Duluth with no one looking twice at him."

"And he almost got away with it, except for you." The policeman held out his hand. "Thanks, Thatcher." The two shook hands and Herman left the studio.

Thatcher returned to his painting. He studied it briefly. With clear water he lifted color off, creating two streaks which slashed the painting from top to bottom. Instantly the illusion of sunlight hit the corner of the dock and sparkled on the water.

"Aha. That's the way I saw it." Thatcher reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out a candy bar. With a sigh of satisfaction he tore off the wrapper and sunk his teeth into the chocolate-covered caramel.

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## DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

*Lee Schultz's first story, "Tunnel Rat," appeared in our issue of September 10, 1980. Now the author goes farther afield for her characters and situation, probing "the quality of mercy" . . .*

# BEYOND ENDURANCE

### by LEE SCHULTZ

"Say, Gramps," I said, as the tall stoop-shouldered man came out of the house carrying two cans of beer in one hand, and two glasses in the other, "did you ever have to decide whether or not to take somebody in for something you felt was justified? Like maybe a woman bullies her husband for years, and then he turns around one day and clobbers her? Do you arrest him for assault, or just warn him not to do it again?" That particular subject had been on my mind recently, as I had defended a woman who had shot the man she lived with, after he beat up her child.

"Well," he answered thoughtfully, "there've been a few times. I remember when Abner Davis died." He stopped while he carefully poured the beer into the glass, watching the head of foam build, and stopping just before it began to spill over . . .

When I knocked on the door of the Davis house (he began, smacking his lips as he sipped through the foam) I had a "feeling." I've had plenty of "feelings" in my twenty-four years as Sheriff of Black Diamond County, and I've seen the result of about every kind of human passion. Emma Davis opened the door and motioned me in. I shut the door behind me and followed as Emma slowly clumped her way with the aid of her walker to her rocking chair.

Emma had been virtually a recluse since she married Abner Davis, as mean and cruel a man as ever lived. Emma had a withered leg—polio, I think—but she had managed to raise three children and help her Sam run their farm.

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I was a little surprised when I saw her—her right arm was all done up in a sloppy cast. Looked like nothing old Doc Wylie would ever do. And her face was covered with bruises in various stages of healing.

"Abner's dead, Sheriff," she said unemotionally. "I killed him. He's in the lake."

She said it with the same inflection I would tell you about what I did with a bag of garbage. She sighed, and seemed curiously relieved as she said it. A tiny brown and black puppy scooted out from under my chair and made a beeline for Emma, who reached down with her good hand, picked it up, and put it on her lap, where it settled down to licking her hand. As she spoke, she fondly petted and scratched the mutt's ears.

"It happened, really, because of the kitten," Emma began. "Little Melissa—Jack Hayden's youngest?—well, she brought a basket of little orange kittens over one day, and when I asked where she was going with the little furry darlings she shyly asked if I'd like one. I was only too pleased to take one off her hands, and I promptly named him Whisper, because of the little whispery way he had of purring. Me'n Whisper got to be friends right off. He'd come scampering out with me to feed the chickens, hopping around like a grasshopper, and when I sat in my rocker by the window Whisper'd hop up on my shoulder and purr in my ear. In the week I had that little fuzzball, I learned to love him awfully.

"And then Abner woke up to his surroundings long enough to realize that something was making me happy again. He came stomping in the back door a week to the day after me and Whisper'd adopted each other, snatched the frightened little thing off my shoulder, and threw it as hard as he could against the wall. When I tried to pick up the poor broken little thing, he knocked me down so hard I busted a coupla ribs. Then he threw what was left of my friend out in the trash can, and stalked off to Devil knows where.

"I managed to get outside to the trash can where I found Whisper still alive, barely, glassy-eyed and bleeding through his ears. Some says a dyin' animal feels no pain, but how do they know? So the only way I could ease Whisper out of this world was to put him in a plastic bag and seal it. I rocked and rocked, cryin' quietly because sobbing hurt my ribs so, until I was sure little Whisper was at peace, then I went out in the orchard and buried him under an old apple tree.

"Seemed like every time I got halfway attached to something he'd

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find a way to destroy it. If he caught me carryin' on a conversation with one of the hens, he'd wring her neck and I'd have to cook chicken and dumplings for him. Or if I started leaving a little cracked corn at the base of the fir tree for a chipmunk, he'd go out and use the creature for target practise. Why, he even cut down a gnarly old apricot tree I liked to sit under, and split it up for firewood.

"Of course he had the phone taken out, and he stopped the newspaper right after we were married, soon's he found out I liked to read. Yeah. I know. Why'd I ever marry him . . .

"Well, after Sam died, I was fearfully lonely. And what with my legs and all, I couldn't really take care of the place. A neighbor would get groceries for me, and sometimes I could hire a boy to help around with chores and such, but they never stayed long, and I couldn't pay much. And so when Abner came calling, I was flattered. I tried to tell myself I couldn't even hope to find a man like Sam again, kind and considerate, and well, at my age, and with my handicap, men weren't exactly bustin' down the front door to come a-courtin'.

"I found out the first week what kind of Devil's bargain I'd struck. I hadn't seasoned the stew the way he preferred it, and he struck me in the face. I was shocked almost insensible. The last time a man ever laid a hand on me in anger was when I was five years old and my Daddy put me over his knee! Even though I knew I'd be humiliated when the word got around, I was determined to put an end to it, so when he finally went to sleep, I sneaked out of the house, intending to try for the Haydens', them bein' the nearest neighbor, and mighty fine folk. I hadn't got more'n half a mile, clumpin' away like a snail with my walker, when Abner just appeared out of nowhere and said, 'Let's go home, Emma.' I was so tired and my legs hurt so bad I hadn't the heart to fight.

"Then last week this puppy pops up out of nowhere. Just ambles into the yard and starts licking my hand, like we was old friends. I tried my best to shoo him off, but he just set his little rump down on my foot and sat up and begged. I was fearful for him and tried to hide him in the barn, but Abner caught me. When I protested he just slapped my bad arm—did I mention that he broke my arm about a month ago? Wouldn't take me to Doc Wylie, set it himself and put a plaster of Paris cast on it, this one here—and snatched up the pup and headed towards the pond. I knew what he was going to do, and all the heart went out of me. I'm better off dead, I thought. I'm dead right now, inside.

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"Then he started hollering for me to get myself out there. Too scairt of him to disobey, I one-armed the walker over to where he stood at the edge of the little lake, and nearly was sick. He was standin' on this rock that sticks out over a deep spot, and below the puppy was swimming frantically, trying to get to shore, but every time he came close Abner'd push him under with a long pole.

"Somethin' snapped in me. He'd pushed me beyond endurance. I knew that little dog was not long for this world—the terror in his eyes told me that. Without even thinking, I raised up this arm and brought that heavy homemade cast down on the back of Abner's head. I like to've died from the pain, but that didn't last long, because I watched that sorry excuse for a human topple into the water and sink like a stone. I sat on that rock and watched for a long time, until even the tiny bubbles stopped popping to the surface.

"At last I was free—even prison couldn't be any worse than being his prisoner. And then something cold and wet bumped against my leg, and there was this pup, soaked, shivering, and half dead. Somehow, while I was in a sort of trance, watching the bubbles rise, that gutsy little critter had made it around the rock to where he could get a pawhold and drag himself out. And the little beggar crawled right over to me! I swear he was tryin' to comfort me, to tell me I done right. But then, what does a dog know about the law, eh, Sheriff?

"So when Billy Hayden came by to buy some eggs, I had him fetch you. D'you suppose they'll let me keep ol' Faithful here with me in prison?"

I cleared my throat (continued Gramps, sticking his nose into the glass to get that last little bit of foam). Something had sneaked into my mind about Abner Davis' first wife. If memory served me, she ran away from Abner, but before she left town, she'd stopped at Doc Wylie's to get her face stitched up where Ab had smacked her, and not for the first time, according to Doc. In my opinion Emma hadn't killed anybody—she had merely exterminated a vermin.

"Emma," I said, "I'm surely sorry to hear about Ab's accident. I'll send some deputies around to try and find the body, but right now I'm taking you in to see Doc Wylie about that arm. Could be you rebroke it trying to save Ab from drowning."

Her mouth dropped in astonishment, but I held up my hand to silence any objections.

"Now, you let me take that pup home for my grandkids to tend

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while you get fixed up, and then we'll go on over to the grocery and get both of you some chow. Get a-movin', now!"

I helped her out of the rocker, and took the pup from her. As she humped out the door, moving that walker with one hand, I swear I saw a fat tear slither down her poor puffy cheek.

I stepped out onto the porch and hollered in the direction of the patrol car. "Deputy! Seems there's been an accident here," and waved him over for instructions.

Sometimes justice has to be tempered with mercy.

Have another beer?

## DETECTIVERSE

*IN THE CARDS*

*by RILEY HUGHES*

*Fear death by water.* With a frown
He tossed the cards with faces down.
No sign or warning made him think
Of poisoned ice cubes in his drink.

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## DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

*This is the 586th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . "Clothes make the man" . . .*

*The author, Roy Sorrels, is in his early forties. "In years gone by" he has "worked as an actor, taught college theater courses, driven a New York taxi, operated an elevator, and served in the U.S. Navy as a jet-engine mechanic on the USS Kitty Hawk." For the past three years he has been a full-time freelance photographer and writer of articles . . .*

# LIKE A MILLION BUCKS

### by ROY SORRELS

He was right—I felt like a million bucks. Funny little guy sold me the suit, said it would make all the difference—little guy about so tall with a mustache like Charlie Chaplin. Brand-new suit and a shine on my shoes—hell, I thought I'd walk home across Central Park and give the squirrels a treat.

Suit made all the difference, all right—I got *mugged*. Wear baggy cords and a sweat shirt like I usually do and nobody messes with me. No percentage in it, they figure. But dress like money—the little guy said that too—and the muggers say, well, well, what have we here?

Only problem is, I got two subway tokens and a dollar nineteen. Friendly neighborhood mugger says, "Hey man, don't kid a kidder, you got bucks. You *dress* like bucks, you *got* bucks!" Skinny kid with a weird sense of logic and a fat knife. Well, my momma didn't raise me to argue with fat knives, so I smiled my "Hey-brotherhood-and-peace" smile and showed him my tokens and jinglin'-money. Son of a gun knocked me down, held his fat knife on me, and kicked my face in real good, put my nose where it hadn't oughta be, rearranged

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my teeth, and did cruel and unusual things to my left ear. What's that you say? Oh, yeah, it did affect my hearing.

Ruined my suit too, but I went out first thing they let me out of the hospital and picked up another suit. Three-piece job with pearly little buttons. Looked like a million bucks. But I didn't put it on, no, sir. I put it in a shopping bag and went back to Central Park looking for my pal, the skinny kid who practised his place-kicking on my head. Figured I owed him a little something. Oh, yeah, and I took along grandaddy's Colt .45.

Thought that kid would wet his pants looking down the barrel of that old .45. "Now, now, my good man," I said, flashing that selfsame brotherhood-and-peace smile (minus four teeth, see, the ones right in front here). "You got me all wrong," says I. "I got a little gift for you, call it a peace offering, it'll make you look like a million bucks."

Hard to say no looking down the business end of a pistol big enough to stop a taxi, so my skinny mugger friend went behind a tree and put on that slick suit.

"Here's looking at you, kid," I said, pointing my six-shooter at his belly button. "Now start walking, right on through the park. I'll be behind a tree or a rock, my friend, drawing a bead on your backside. Just keep walking, that's all."

Skinny kid was pretty scared, I could tell. But he did like I told him. Got mugged ten minutes later—an altercation involving a straight razor and a mean-looking dude who wouldn't take no for an answer. Ruined the suit—can't wash all that blood out, you know. Kid looked like a million bucks, too.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

# CRIME BEAT

**by R. E. PORTER**

*CONDENSED MYSTERIES:* The Reader's Digest has published its *third two-volume set of Great Stories of Mystery and Suspense.* (The first set was reviewed in the December 1974 *EQMM* by John Dickson Carr.) There are always purists who insist upon the complete work, and Agatha Christie would never allow her novels to be condensed. But the ten books included here are certainly of classic stature: Dick Francis' *For Kicks,* Ed McBain's *Fuzz,* Nicholas Blake's *The Beast Must Die,* C. S. Forester's *Payment Deferred,* John Dickson Carr's *The Burning Court,* Ira Levin's *A Kiss Before Dying,* Nicolas Freeling's *The King of the Rainy Country,* Mignon G. Eberhart's *Five Passengers from Lisbon,* Ross Macdonald's *The Moving Target,* and Patricia Highsmith's *Strangers on a Train.* I'd read seven of these in their complete versions, and I was pleased at how well the digests captured the plot and flavor of the originals. Only McBain's book suffers a bit, since the extra details are so important to the atmosphere of the 87th Precinct series. But at least one of the others is actually improved by shortening and the entire project is well worth the effort. The illustrated set, priced at $14.95 plus postage, is available from The Reader's Digest Association, Pleasantville, NY 10570.

*BOWLING GREEN U.:* Few publishers in America have a longer list of biographical and critical books in the mystery field than Bowling Green University Popular Press. With a backlist of more than a dozen titles, including Francis M. Nevins's Edgar-winning study of Ellery Queen, *Royal Bloodline,* the Press is adding several new books each year. This fall will see publication of *The Special Branch: The Spy Novel from 1890–1980* by LeRoy Panek, author of last year's Edgar nominee, *Watteau's Shepherds.* In preparation are five new titles: *10 More Women of Mystery,* edited by Jane Bakerman; *A Baker's Dozen: 13 Men of Mystery,* edited by Earl Bargainnier; *The Police Procedural* by George Dove; and two titles from Peter Wolfe, *The World of Raymond Chandler* and *John le Carré.*

*MORE SAYERS:* Another biography of Dorothy L. Sayers, the seventh in the past few years, would hardly seem necessary. Yet James



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Brabazon's *Dorothy L. Sayers* (Scribners, $14.95) is indeed the definitive volume its publisher claims, and should become the standard life of Sayers. Written with the cooperation of her son, Anthony Fleming, who contributes a Preface, this is the first book to rely heavily on Sayers' private papers and letters. It also includes a fine Foreword by P. D. James and a bibliography of Sayers' published and unpublished work. (And add to the current Sayers boom *The Lord Peter Wimsey Cookbook* by Elizabeth Bond Ryan and William J. Eakins, from Ticknor & Fields.)

*GRAND MASTER:* Just in time for Stanley Ellin's winning of the Grand Master Award from Mystery Writers of America last June, Foul Play Press (an imprint of Countryman Press, Woodstock, VT) reissued his first five novels in trade paperback editions at $4.95 each. They include *Dreadful Summit, The Panama Portrait, The Winter After This Summer,* and two of Ellin's very best, *The Key to Nicholas Street* and *The Eighth Circle.*

*CRIME FICTION CRITICISM:* For librarians and scholars in the field, Garland Publishing recently issued an annotated bibliography of more than 1,800 books, essays, and dissertations on crime fiction. A section of general works on the mystery is followed by items on over 250 individual authors. Edited by Timothy W. Johnson and Julia Johnson, *Crime Fiction Criticism* is priced at $40.00.

*COMING ATTRACTIONS:* This will be a big winter for locked-room fans. On Friday the 13th of November, Ticknor & Fields is publishing *All But Impossible!,* the 1981 Mystery Writers of America anthology, edited by Edward D. Hoch. And early next year Walker is publishing *Incredible Locked Room Mysteries,* edited by Isaac Asimov, Martin H. Greenberg, and Charles Waugh. There's no duplication between the two volumes, which proves how many good locked-room stories are available to editors. Asimov and Greenberg (and co-editor Carol-Lynn Waugh) also have *New York's Finest,* an anthology of mysteries set in that city, coming from Avon next year.

October will bring a new title from The Mysterious Press (129 W. 56th Street, New York, NY 10019). *Murder Must Appetize* is the first American edition of a slim book by H. R. F. Keating on the Golden Age of the detective story in Britain.

Ed McBain's new novel, *Heat,* is coming from Viking in November. This is the first of his 87th Precinct books to appear in *Playboy* prior to publication. And speaking of firsts, Phyllis A. Whitney's *Vermilion,* from Doubleday in October, is the first of hers to be a dual main selection of the Literary Guild.

Lawrence Block has two books on Arbor House's fall list: *Telling Lies for Fun & Profit: A Manual for Fiction Writers,* with an Introduction by Brian Garfield, and a new novel, *A Stab in the Dark.*

Ken Follett is working on an Edwardian thriller tentatively titled *The Man from St. Petersburg.*

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# BLOODY VISIONS

**by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER**

The hero throws his burning torch to the girl hanging beside him above a dark archeological excavation, the fabled Well of Souls; the floor beneath them is a writhing carpet of snakes numbering literally in the thousands. "Shove it at anything that squirms," he shouts, while we in the audience squirm and exult by turns. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is a high-blown, enthusiastic return to the sort of thriller found in the pulp magazines and Saturday film serials of the '30s, the period in which it is set, and is as welcome an escape as is to be had these weary days.

The heroism is on the grandest scale—as befits high melodrama—even though hero Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford), a bespectacled professor of archeology who abandons his glasses for a bullwhip he uses most dexterously while "in the field," is not above sacking jungle temples and desert tombs. Our government has recruited Jones to find no less than the Ark of the Covenant containing the crumbled tablets of the Ten Commandments—because Hitler wants it also. The German leader, obsessed with the occult, feels possession of the Ark will legitimize his destiny, and his agents are moving through Egypt, searching for the lost city of Tanis where in a subterranean tomb called the Well of Souls a tenth-century pharaoh buried the relic after its disappearance from the Temple of Solomon. Indiana Jones must get the Ark first. So the quest begins, adventure piles on adventure, and our hero finds himself pitted against formidable opponents—Nazi villains of, describes director Steven Spielberg, "despicable class and wit."

Thieves' dens deep in Nepal, sinister and twisting Cairo alleys, a massive submarine base burrowed into a North African mountain, a South American jungle temple filled with tarantulas and deadly mechanical traps—all the lush settings of the wildest pulps fire the imagery of *Raiders,* recycling these themes with affection. Its closest inspirations, though, are the serials of yore, especially *Secret Service in Darkest Africa,* in which Rod Cameron battled Germany's desert armies for a talisman with the chases and derring-do remarkably similar. Indeed the ravines and oases outside Hollywood used as backdrops for the old serials look every inch as real as the authentic locations of the new film, curiously enough. No matter, reality is not the question here, only heroism and villainy and skulduggery and melodrama, all of which *Raiders of the Lost Ark* serves up in epic portions.

Epic adventure of a somewhat grimmer turn can be found in John Carpenter's *Escape from New York,* a harrowing view of a near future where the world's greatest city has become a walled-in penal colony for incorrigible criminals. Carpenter, you will remember, is the talented young creator of such thrillers as *Someone Is Watching Me, Hallowe'en,* and *The Fog.*



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In his film he poses a tomorrow where the crime rate has risen four hundred percent, where by the 1990s a decayed, bankrupt Manhattan, abandoned by all except the criminal classes, is converted into a maximum-security, walled prison city, with escape impossible. Prisoners sent to the island are under life sentence, never to return—they have the option of suicide. Radar scanners and helicopters survey the ruins endlessly, while food is air-dropped into Central Park once a month. Into this seventh circle of Hell a plane carrying the President of the United States crashes on its way to a vital conference. A steely, tough young criminal named Snake is conscripted against his will to penetrate the sealed city and rescue the President within twenty-four hours.

We move with Snake through the dark rubble and the decay of an abandoned, horrifying world, peopled with degenerate outcasts. It is a nightmarish vision, similar to Carpenter's equally gripping *Assault on Precinct 13,* his first important suspense film. While the characters scurrying through the subterranean rat-holes of a ravaged city are somewhat stock, the tension is tight and the film chilling. *Escape from New York* is as gritty as *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is high-spirited, but both movies are welcome examples of melodramatic screen thrills. We'll take as many raids and escapes as are ahead.

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# INTERVIEW: WILLIAM BANKIER (1)

This is the first part of an interview that will be concluded in the next issue.

*EQMN:* You live in London but were born in Canada, is that right?

*BANKIER:* Yes, I was born in Belleville, Ontario, and went to high school there, moved to Montreal when I was twenty-one, and was married there. After a holiday trip to England in 1972 with my wife Phyllis, we became incurably dissatisfied with life as it stood and had to become Londoners, so we did the major job of severing, job, house, friendships, and financial security —I was creative director of Canada's largest advertising agency in Montreal, MacLaren's—and moved to London in '74 with our daughters, Heather and Amy, then seventeen and fourteen.

*EQMN:* You write about people coming face to face with their deepest selves, deciding what's worth living for and what isn't, and what one can live with and what one can't. You also write about the fragility of self-esteem and of acts of great desperation. Do you see much of these things in the behavior of people?

*BANKIER:* I don't see many acts of desperation in life around me. I believe people want to break loose



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and change things but most are afraid to take the risk. They experience excitement through reading about it or seeing it on the screen. I give vent by writing about it.

*EQMN:* But your move to England means you're able to seize the moment. Where does your ability to do that come from?

*BANKIER:* Phyl is much more ready to seize the moment than I am. The adventurer within me responds to her.

*EQMN:* Do you have any fears?

*BANKIER:* There is my little problem of not being able to get into an airplane. Something else I have is claustrophobia, which, with my irrational fear of flying, makes a set. When next I return to America it will be by ship, if they are still running them. Come to think of it, they may have the bridge completed by that time and I'll be able to hitchhike.

*EQMN:* Along with Clark Howard, Edward D. Hoch, and John Lutz, you were nominated for an Edgar from the Mystery Writers of America for best mystery short story published last year. How long have you been writing?

*BANKIER:* Oh, since, let's say, ten years old. Earlier, my brother and I filled notebooks with the scribbled history of a world population called The Grampas. Another brother and I used to write a story together often on a Sunday afternoon, using his portable typewriter, one writing a paragraph, the other coming along and reading it and adding the next paragraph. We killed off each other's characters and left the plot in impossible situations. It was fun.

*EQMN:* Where did you have your first success as a writer?

*BANKIER:* My first published story was in *Liberty Magazine* (Toronto) about twenty-five years ago—it won a Canadian Short Story of the Month prize. Shortly thereafter I connected with Curtis Brown and Emmy Jacobson there has been my agent ever since.

I had some TV plays and radio plays produced in Montreal and this year the BBC accepted a one-hour radio drama of mine, *The Night Stan Kenton Died.* It went out on the air in late February.

*EQMN:* Love of music is a recurring theme in your stories.

*BANKIER:* Music has always been important to me. My father was a fine tenor who earned his living singing the song of the week in early nickelodeon theaters. I sang in church choirs for many years. In high school I played the Major-General in *The Pirates of Penzance.* I love jazz and taught myself to play clarinet and tenor saxophone; never came to New York without inhabiting the old Metropole to hear Cozy Cole, Sol Yaged, Tony Parenti et al. Had I known Phyllis then she would have had me in a band and who knows? But I let them slip. Today I play a recorder by ear. My big number is "I Can't Get Started."

"Q"



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# THE JURY BOX

**by JON L. BREEN**

Though Richard Stark's professional thief Parker ranks high among the series criminals of mystery fiction, collectors have often found his adventures (mostly published only in soft covers) hard to come by. Now the first seven Parker novels have been reprinted in handsome and permanent hardcover editions by Gregg Press (70 Lincoln St., Boston, MA 02111; $10.95 each), all with new Introductions by major mystery writers and some illustrated with movie stills.

*The Hunter,* originally published in 1962 and one of the great paperback originals, leads off the series with an informative Introduction by Donald E. Westlake, the famous name behind the Stark pseudonym. A hard-boiled novel that comes nonstop from Hammett, without the usual Chandler stopover, it is sure to grip even readers (like this one) who normally find books about professional crime the least interesting branch of mystery fiction.

Those who wish Stark had written more Parker novels—and it has been seven years since the last new one—should try Max Collins' Nolan, an only slightly jollier character whose adventures follow very similar lines, even to the chapter-numbering pattern. *Bait Money* (Pinnacle, $1.95), revised version of a novel first published in 1973, is fast and compelling reading from a storyteller of considerable skill. New Nolan novels are promised, indicating that Collins' career as new chronicler of Dick Tracy has not led him to abandon novel-writing. Good news indeed.

*** Bill Pronzini: *Hoodwink,* St. Martin's, $10.95. San Francisco's Nameless Detective, among the most likeable and distinctive of private eyes, attends a convention of pulp writers and fans and solves two locked-room murders in his latest case, a nice blend of nostalgia, romance, action, and fair-play puzzle-making. The sleuth's reluctance to wear a nametag while attending the convention is a humorous touch.

*** Arthur Lyons: *Hard Trade,* Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, $10.95. Lyons is one of the best stylists extant in the hard-boiled tradition. Private-eye Jacob Asch runs the familiar course and never misses a jump—yes, he even gets hit over the head on page 139. The novel has a certain *roman à clef* interest for followers of the political scene, especially in the Southern California area. Asch's view of politics is appropriately cynical.

*** Jack S. Scott: *The View from Deacon Hill,* Ticknor and Fields, $9.95. Family relationships (especially between husbands and wives) are more central to Scott's latest than detective Rosher or the criminal plot, and he handles them with both humanity and irony. A young American cop, visiting to observe British police methods, and his alcoholic wife are especially well drawn and affecting.

*** Barbara Paul: *Your Eyelids Are Growing Heavy,* Doubleday-Crime Club, $9.95. Three likeable and memorable main characters and a



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fresh treatment of an old mystery standby, hypnosis, combine to make this light, fast-reading thriller very satisfying and entertaining. There are hints of the beginning of a series. Some of the tricks of hypnosis described here take some believing, but they may well be possible.

*** Joe R. Lansdale: *Act of Love*, Zebra, $2.75. A black/white team of cops hunt the Houston Hacker in this first novel, characterized by relentless blood and gore and a wrought-up, mannered writing style reminiscent of McBain or Wainwright. The explicit horrors (shades of EC comics!) may turn some readers off, but Lansdale is a fine natural storyteller who knows how to keep the pages flying. The "major league" efforts discussed below have more polish but less gut-level reader interest.

** Anne Worboys: *Run, Sara, Run*, Scribners, $10.95. The story of a London actress terrorized by an unseen enemy is a pure suspense tale somewhat in the vein of Charlotte Armstrong, who had a quality Worboys does not display here: humor. Reader interest is vitiated by the solemnity and a resultant soap-opera quality to the dialogue and narrative. (My gothics consultant advises me that this may be the rare woman's book that a male reader just can't identify with or judge fairly.)

** A. H. Garnet: *The Santa Claus Killer*, Ticknor and Fields, $10.95. This novel of politics and gangsterism in a suburb of Detroit reminds me of a Frank Capra movie, with roles for Jean Arthur, Claude Rains, and Jimmy Stewart, who might just make Charley Thayer's simple nobility credible. The happy sappy ending is all too predictable. Best feature is a good TV news background for those who think R. R. Irvine has been too long between books.

** Howard Shaw: *Killing No Murder*, Scribners, $8.95. Here is a low-key, very traditional English detective novel with a determinedly atmospheric finish, set in the sure-fire background of a boys' boarding school. Even those (like me) who love this kind of thing will find this one just doesn't come off, starting nicely but losing impetus after the first murder. It was originally published in Britain in 1972 as by Colin Howard.

** T. A. Schock: *Pratfall*, Leisure, $2.25. The first in a new series about press agent-detective Daniel Keel has an interesting show-biz background and some nice lines (e.g., the description of a gossip columnist with "a portable valley on her chest"), but the author seems less concerned with the mystery plot than the one-liners. The promised sequels, though, will be worth watching for.

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"Q"



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# DETECTIVERSE

## *A MOUSSE OF A DIFFERENT FLAVOR*

*by DEBBI MILLER-GUTIERREZ*

He came home after working late
and turned his nose up at his plate.
"Oh, just dessert for me," he said.
She smiled and gave him gingerbread.
The next night it was after ten
when he came in, and said again,
"No dinner, just dessert this time."
She frowned but gave him sherbet (lime).
Dumfounded by this sudden loss
of appetite, she phoned his boss
and found there'd been no extra work.
He'd been out with some girl—the jerk!
The next time "Just dessert" he sighed,
she topped his mousse with cyanide.
Of course they took her off to jail
and held her there in lieu of bail.
Now see how quietly she waits
to hear the jury seal her fate.
"Your verdict, please," the judge demands.
The courtroom stills; the foreman stands.
"We find her guilty of the crime,
but recommend she serve no time.
For after all," the foreman blurts,
"the victim got his 'just desserts'."

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"Q"



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**a *NEW* detective story by**

**JAMES POWELL**

*Details!—beautiful, delicious, chuckling details. James Powell is a master of them . . . Here is detective Ambrose Ganelon in 1875, sixty-five years old, away from his beloved San Sebastiano and visiting St. Petersburg, Russia, and becoming involved in the case of the notorious jewel thief, the Snowman . . . Ganelon whose power of ratiocination has earned him the rank of Treasure of the Principality, First Class . . . Ganelon whose sobriquet was "the Genghis Khan of Detection" . . .*

# THE NOTORIOUS SNOWMAN

***by JAMES POWELL***

On a December afternoon in 1875 Ambrose Ganelon, a black forelock carefully arranged across his impressive brow, stood at a window of his suite in St. Petersburg's fashionable Hotel du Nord, his short stout frame shaking with laughter. Below him in the broad windswept gloom of the Nevsky Prospekt a slender young cavalry officer stepping from an open droshky had reminded the detective of the most recent joke about that arrogant and empty-headed breed making the rounds in intelligent society: "Have you heard of the cavalry officer who was so stupid the other cavalry officers were starting to notice?"

Detective Ganelon was still smiling when his attention was drawn across the boulevard to a limping figure in a greasy, padded overcoat who had just hurried up from the same direction as the droshky. This new arrival stopped right opposite the hotel and stroked his long ragged beard with an expression of wild cunning and calculation.

As Ganelon marveled at the contrast between this face and that

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of the cavalry officer, the dome of St. Isaac's Cathedral caught the last rays of the scanty winter light and glowed as bright and golden as Ganelon's own sun, conjuring him back to San Sebastiano and his comfortable armchair and his beloved Prattmann oboe. A knock interrupted this pleasant reverie.

Sergeant Lucas, Ganelon's bodyguard, answered the door and brought over a visiting card sent up from the lobby. Ganelon read it and nodded. A minute later Lieutenant Paul Orlovsky of the Chevalier Guards, the same officer whose arrival Ganelon had noted from the window, strode into the room, tossing his coat, hat, and gloves to the startled Lucas without a sideward glance.

Ganelon offered Orlovsky a chair and endured polite conversation until the arrival of the steaming glass of tea the hotel presented to winter visitors. When the officer set down his glass he still appeared in no hurry to state his business. Screwing a monocle into his eye he regarded the detective languidly as he might a curiosity on display. Ganelon knew what the man was waiting for. People expected him to look them up and down and make some astonishing deduction based on the mud on their instep or where they carried their pocket handkerchief.

Having no desire to prolong the interview, Ganelon gave the man a penetrating look. There really wasn't much to deduce. Russian officers had scores of batmen to keep their kits impeccable, which was to say clueless. The man's drawing room pallor was understandable. The Chevalier Guards were attached to the Imperial household and this was the season of balls and social gatherings.

Then Ganelon smiled to himself, noting the arc of angry teeth marks between the officer's right thumb and forefinger. The Empress always kept a short-tempered throng of Pekinese about her, each of which she would soothe and fondle in turn and pass on to an equerry. Orlovsky must have gotten a wrong handle on one. And that bite was too fresh to have come from Moscow where the Empress had gone to attend the accouchement of a daughter. Therefore the Empress had returned. Therefore the child had been delivered.

"So tell me, Lieutenant, does Russia have a new Grand Duke or a new Grand Duchess?"

Orlovsky blinked so stupidly that Ganelon made no attempt to conceal his impatience as he described his reasoning.

"Amazing!" declared the officer. "All that from a little doggy bite. And of course you're right. A fine baby boy."

"Now then, what can I do for you, Lieutenant?"

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"I've just now come from the livery stable that supplies the coaches that cross the ice to Kronstadt," said Orlovsky. "They informed me that you have engaged their last vehicle for a trip there this afternoon. As one gentleman to another I am hoping I can get you to share your coach with my sister who has passage on a ship leaving this evening."

Ganelon had come to St. Petersburg to be formally inducted into the Imperial Society of Amateur Woodwind Virtuosi. He had only intended to spend a week in the Russian capital. But his archrival, the wily Dr. Ludwig Fong, had chosen that moment to offer Ganelon's weight in louis d'or to the man who could rid Fong of the one he hated most in all the world. This bounty sent professional assassins swarming over every train out of Russia.

Fearing for Ganelon's safety, San Sebastiano's Prince Feinhart had dispatched the royal steam yacht, the *Guido Tancredi* then at Cowes, to pick up Ganelon at the Russian island naval base at Kronstadt which served as the icebound St. Petersburg's winter port. This required Ganelon to extend his visit. During this time, if police reports were correct, a pair of highbinders from Fong's Young Fu Brotherhood had reached the city.

Ganelon explained this situation to Orlovsky, adding, "By departing without fanfare we hope to minimize the chance of Fong's people making a move against me. But why subject your sister to the slightest risk when, I have no doubt, she can delay her departure by a day or two without any great inconvenience?"

"I'm afraid that's impossible," said the officer. "You see, my sister recently returned from several years abroad completing her education. She left with a quick mind and while away she added a quick tongue to it. Last night at the Bal des Palmiers she made an indiscreet remark concerning the Princess Dolgoruki, an intimate friend of the Emperor himself. Our table must have included an informant for the Third Section."

"The Secret Police?"

Orlovsky nodded. "Early this morning two of their agents appeared at my sister's door and informed her she had twenty-four hours to leave Russia and could not return for a year." Ganelon's black scowl drawn from that arsenal of dark looks which had earned him the nickname, the Genghis Khan of Detection, obliged the officer to explain. "However unjust in my sister's case, such summary sentences of exile are part of the new law the State has enacted to save us from the anarchists and other illegal elements in our midst."

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"An excessive law, sir," insisted Ganelon.

Orlovsky shrugged. "Anyone can obey a reasonable law. The truly faithful subject obeys the unreasonable ones with even greater zeal." The philosophical ring of these words pleased the officer immensely.

Ganelon pulled himself to his feet with a weary chuckle. "I think I admire your sister's spirit, Lieutenant. She is welcome to share our fate if she wishes. We leave in two hours."

After showing Orlovsky to the door, Ganelon returned to the window. But the dome of St. Isaac's was dim. Snow was falling across the city. Ganelon saw Orlovsky emerge from the hotel and step into his droshky. As the vehicle moved off, a gray shape stepped from a doorway across the street and limped after it.

A hard snow was slanting out of the early darkness and into the glow of the streetlights when a coach on runners, with baggage lashed to the roof, pulled away from a side entrance of the Hotel du Nord and turned onto the hard-packed surface of the Nevsky Prospekt.

Ganelon sat at a window seat, bundled up in a long raccoon-skin coat with huge lapels, a wolf-skin cap with earflaps and immense fur mittens. Experiencing his first taste of Russian winter on his arrival from Berlin, Ganelon had gone right from the railroad station to the furrier. But, even at sixty-five, Ganelon possessed a deep wellspring of vanity and he suspected the outfit made him look the fool.

This concern was aggravated by the presence of Miss Vera Orlovsky, the Lieutenant's sister. The handsome young woman with large, sad, green eyes sat with her arms out of the sleeves of her fur coat, a buffalo-skin lap robe across her knees, staring intently at the frost on the window. A green and white enamel heater hung from the ceiling beside her. Hot coals put into this box through an outside metal trap beneath the coachman's bench were supposed to warm the coach and the coachman's feet as well.

On the other side of the heater sat a small Tartar-looking man with a consequential air that belied the condition of his brown melon hat or his shabby overcoat. He had arrived with the Orlovskys and presented himself to Ganelon in the hotel lobby. "Putiatin of the Third Section," he announced. "I must accompany this lady to the gangplank." Mistaking Ganelon's stony stare for incredulity the man pulled out his credentials. "Probationary agent Putiatin."

But the detective waved the proof away. "Who would claim to

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belong to the Russian Secret Police if he did not?" he asked. Before Ganelon turned away, he noticed the bibulous cheek veins which might explain the man's probationary status.

Of course the everwatchful Lucas who now sat across from Putiatin had checked the man's papers. Lucas was a phenomenon. In all the years since Ganelon's power of ratiocination had been named a Treasure of the Principality, First Class, and Sergeant Lucas had been assigned to him as a bodyguard, he had never once caught the man when his mind was not exactly where his body was. Ganelon sometimes feared Lucas had no dreams. But the man just preferred to keep them for his time off. Two nights ago, for example, while Ganelon and the other Fellows of the Imperial Society of Amateur Woodwind Virtuosi attended a private and well-guarded dinner at the Restaurant Dunon hosted by the bassoon-playing Tsarevitch Alexis, Lucas had spent his free night at one of the final performances of a touring American Wild West show.

With darkness falling fast the coach reached the end of the boulevard and turned to the northeast to avoid the spired Admiralty and skirt the immense pile of the Winter Palace. As the heater blunted the chill it misted up the windows. Ganelon used a mitten tip to clean a section of glass. The coach was descending an elegant ramp walled in gray granite. Then it reached the frozen surface of the Neva itself and the runners gave off a cleaner, more tempered sound. The coach swung wide around a hippodrome with bleachers and a clubhouse built on the ice, the racecourse marked out with cut fir trees set upright in the snow. Beyond, in the gloaming, stood the Stock Exchange and its rostral columns.

Before the coach completed its arc Ganelon got a glimpse of the towers of the intimidating Fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul. Then the crowded lights on the islands grew sparser. Then the shore itself fell back behind them as the coach moved out onto the Gulf of Finland. The driving snow was horizontal now in the light given off by the lanterns which marked each quarter mile of their route across the ice. The twenty-mile trip to Kronstadt would take two hours.

Putiatin pulled out a pint bottle of vodka and cleared his throat solemnly. "Third Section regulations do permit an agent on duty to take alcohol for his stomach's sake when serving on the high seas." Laughing at his joke, he pounded the floor with his foot. The cork came out of the bottle with a pop. Putiatin offered it to the viceless Lucas who declined with a gesture of the hand. Ganelon refused as

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well, and Miss Orlovsky, still staring into the darkness, didn't even notice the offer.

Putiatin gave an indifferent shrug. "It comes from a little vodka shop in a side street near your hotel. They flavor it with woodruff like in the village where I grew up." Putiatin took a long pull on the bottle. He smacked his lips appreciatively and searched for something else to drink to. "A toast to our glorious police!" he exclaimed. "The Snowman's days are numbered!" He drank again. Then he pounded the floor, giggled, and turning his back on his companions he burrowed down into the buffalo robe for a nap.

As Ganelon knew, the Snowman was the daring thief who had been stealing jewels by the double handfuls at the bals des palmiers, the court dinner dances for the last three winter seasons. The newspapers called him the Snowman because he seemed to melt away each spring. Rumor had it that the jewels financed *The Tocsin*, a liberal journal published abroad and smuggled back into Russia.

Ganelon had come to St. Petersburg half expecting the police would request his assistance in the case. But just before his arrival, Markov, one of the Snowman's gang, was caught trying to cross by train into Germany carrying sixteen emeralds, eight diamonds, and twenty-five rubies in his stomach. The Russian police reportedly acted on a tip from the German authorities. Apparently Markov did not know who the Snowman really was. But under police questioning—of what sort Ganelon had no doubt—he betrayed another gang member named Bunin who was later shot in a police ambush, returning over the rooftops to his room near the Hay Market. According to Markov, this Bunin, now lying unconscious in the hospital, did know the real identity of the Snowman. Yet in spite of this, last night the thief had struck again.

Thinking this Snowman might prove a worthy adversary, Ganelon asked, "Miss Orlovsky, could you tell me a little about these bals des palmiers?"

Vera Orlovsky brushed an eyelash with a fingertip before turning from the frosted pane. "I beg your pardon?"

Ganelon repeated his question.

"Ah," she said, half smiling. "Well, Mr. Ganelon, when winter comes we Russians like to pretend we are living in the tropics. Picture a South Sea island inhabited by the brightest parrots and most sparkling hummingbirds imaginable and there is your bal des palmiers. The hussars in their velvet slung jackets of every hue, and the women, their hair, throats, wrists, and waists aglitter with jew-

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els all spinning together in the dance among the rows of live palm trees from the greenhouses at Tsarskoe Selo. And all the while on the other side of the tall windows of the Nicholas Hall snow sweeps across the Neva ice and the temperature is five below."

"Suppose you and I pass the time to Kronstadt by solving this Snowman business," said Ganelon, "who he is and how he does it. You were at the ball last night. You could be my eyes and ears."

The woman shook her head. "You honor me. But you'll need better eyes and ears than those of a foolish woman in love. I saw no one but Prince Waldemar and heard no voice but his."

"I understand," said Ganelon. "Please don't disturb yourself. Old detectives like to have their riddles to chew on."

Vera Orlovsky laughed bitterly. "Then try explaining why I was denounced to the Secret Police by a man who said he loved me."

"Prince Waldemar? But your brother said the whole table overheard your remark."

"That isn't quite accurate," said Vera Orlovsky. "Do you know the story of Catherine the Great and the violet, Mr. Ganelon? Walking about her estate at Tsarskoe Selo one day the Empress discovered the first spring violet pushing up through the snow and ordered a soldier posted there to protect it. Since the order was never rescinded, one hundred and fifty years later a soldier still stands there through rain or shine.

"Well, as my brother, the Prince, and I were going into dinner, we were discussing current gossip about the jealousy of the Emperor regarding the Princess Dolgoruki. As we sat down I compared the concern of a certain unnamed august gentleman for the honor of a certain titled lady to this tragic sentry standing guard over a bloom long departed. A cruel remark meant to be humorous. But no one but the Prince and my brother knew whom I was referring to. Though my brother grows sillier every day, I don't doubt his affection for a moment. Therefore it must have been Prince Waldemar."

"Then tell me about him," asked Ganelon.

"Our families were always close. He was like an older brother to me." She smiled. "An older and more responsible one. When silly Paul ran off and joined a traveling show at seventeen, it was Waldemar who brought him back. Then Waldemar inherited an estate of many souls, as they used to say. In the south near Odessa. Not long after that a well-to-do aunt bought Paul a commission in the Chevalier Guards and sent me abroad to finish my education. When I returned Prince Waldemar was up here on a visit. We saw a great

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deal of each other. He delayed his departure. Then he delayed it again. Commitments were made. Now suddenly he has me sent away. Why, Mr. Ganelon?"

The detective spread his mittens. "I'm still too young to try to unravel the mysteries of the heart." But Ganelon thought about it, his mind still half on the bal-des-palmiers business. Of course that might be the explanation for Prince Waldemar's conduct. Suppose he was the Snowman. He's lost his regular way of getting the jewels out of the country. He denounces her to the Secret Police, knowing it wouldn't be difficult to slip the jewels into her baggage and not much chance the baggage would be examined by customs when she was escorted out of the country by the Secret Police. "Miss Orlovsky, did Prince Waldemar come up for the winter season each year?"

"No," she said. "This was his first season in years. He only stayed on my account. He said he wanted to dance every dance at every ball with me. And he did."

Ganelon gave a dismal sigh. It couldn't be Waldemar. The silence lengthened. Vera Orlovsky turned back to her frozen window. Lucas crossed his legs. Putiatin snored beneath the buffalo robe.

Many minutes later a sudden jangle of bells and wind-muffled shouts and curses dashed by them out of the night and just as quickly were gone. Their coach swerved, tottered, rose into the air, and then fell back down with a heavy jolt and a sharp crack. The vehicle spun a quarter turn before dragging to a halt. Lucas' side of the coach was three feet higher than Ganelon's.

The policeman threw open his door and hoisted himself outside to see what had happened. Putiatin woke up, emptied his bottle in one gulp, added Lucas' buffalo robe to his own, and went back to sleep. Ganelon pushed his door open with his shoulder and fought his way forward to the horses through the driving snow and howling wind. A marker light ten feet away cast a shallow light across the accident. The horse down on the ice gasped for breath. The other three stamped in their harness. The left coach runner had been shattered to kindling.

At the edge of the darkness, staring out across the ice, Lucas shouted, "The coachman bolted with a small green leather piece of luggage. I think he was hurt. He was limping." Lucas drew his pistol and turned back to the injured horse.

Ganelon remained where Lucas had been standing, staring off into the darkness. He heard the pistol shot behind him.

"I'll have to ride for help," shouted Lucas, cutting the remaining

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lead horse out of its traces. "I'll be back in two hours." He pressed his pistol into Ganelon's hand, swung up onto the horse's back, and galloped off into the darkness.

Ganelon led the other horses around to the lee side of the coach and tied them there. Then he rejoined Vera Orlovsky. He explained their predicament, adding, "There's nothing to worry about. We're just in for a bit of a wait." He sat back down without unbuttoning his coat and pulled the lap robe up over his knees. With all the coming and going the air was chill and the coals in the heater were old. The wind seemed to pipe in at every crack now. "Did you have a green case among your things, Miss Orlovsky?" asked the detective. "A gift from your brother, perhaps?"

"Why, yes," she marveled. "My new vanity case. A going-away present."

"Forgive me for not elaborating," said Ganelon. "I don't have all the facts and probably never will. But I can tell you this: Prince Waldemar did not betray you to the Secret Police. And your brother does love you."

Without another word he buried his chin in his upturned lapels to hide a fierce scowl. Diable, how neatly the preposterous cavalry officer had hooked the patronizing detective and reeled him in like a fat stupid fish! Lieutenant Paul Orlovsky, alias the St. Petersburg Snowman, had convinced the great Ambrose Ganelon himself to escort the stolen jewels and his sister, whom he wanted out of harm's way, to the boat.

Vera Orlovsky interrupted this dark brooding with an earnest, "Listen!" Other sounds were crowding in on the wind. "Wolves," said the woman with a grimace. "I thought I heard them five minutes ago. Now they're closer. In hard winters they sometimes come south out of the forests of Finland. Welcome to Russia, Mr. Ganelon. The dead horse will draw them like flies."

"Well, when the horse is finished we'll throw them Putiatin here," said Ganelon lightly. The Secret Police agent's snores were growing louder by the minute. "Anyway, we'll be safe in here," said the detective. "They're not going to come in through the windows." But the reassurance he hoped for didn't come.

"The subject's too shrouded in myth and legend for a Russian to give you an answer on that," she said.

Ganelon stood up and drew Lucas' pistol out of his overcoat pocket. "I'm going to have to let the horses loose and give them a chance to run for it," he said. "I might even get a shot off at a wolf."

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As Ganelon reached for the door it burst open and a large gray shape lunged inside. Ganelon was knocked across the seat. The pistol flew up in the air and landed in Vera Orlovsky's lap. In an instant she had it aimed squarely and unwaveringly at the head of the bearded man in the padded overcoat, the coachman, who lay moaning with fear on the floor of the coach.

Snow swirled about them. Ganelon got to his feet and closed the door. Then he stepped around the new arrival's body and over to Putiatin. The snoring man had brought a second bottle for the return trip. He passed the bottle down to the man who, chest heaving, had just propped himself up on one elbow and looked the very personification of winter, his beard all matted with frost and hung with icicles around the mouth. It was the man with the limp, the one who had watched Orlovsky from the other side of the Nevsky Prospekt.

Ganelon crossed back to the door. "Shoot if you have to, Miss Orlovsky," he said and stepped outside into the wind and blinding snow. He found his way around the coach to the horses. A slap on the rump sent them thundering off down the ice to Kronstadt. Ganelon stood there for a moment, a good ten miles out to sea on the ice of the Gulf of Finland with the wind and the wolves howling all around him. Then he turned back inside where a mystery waited to be fully unraveled.

A third of the vodka in the bottle was gone. When Ganelon took back the bottle, the bearded man watched him less in fear now than with shrewdness. When the detective pointed to Lucas' place on the seat the man got up, dragged off one of Putiatin's buffalo robes, wrapped himself in it, and sat down. Then he said something in Russian.

"He says in his village they flavor the vodka with anise," translated Vera Orlovsky. "He says anise is better."

"Ask him about the bal-des-palmier jewels."

Her eyes grew large but she did. Ganelon did not have to wait for a translation of the man's claim of ignorance. He gestured toward the door. "Then tell him he isn't welcome here," he said. As if on cue a wolf howled nearby.

The man's eyes found their fear again. As he talked, Vera Orlovsky translated. "The jewels are lost out there on the ice, sir. I ran from the accident meaning to work my way to the lanterns and follow them to Kronstadt. But I became lost in the storm. Then I heard the wolves. I fell several times running from the sound. I lost the green leather case. I didn't dare stop to look for it. The howling

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was all around me. I ran through the wind and darkness with the wolves on my scent, I know. I ran until I stumbled onto the roadway again, right out here. I'd come full circle."

"And what of the real coachman?" demanded Ganelon.

The man smiled craftily and nodded at the vodka. "Among us, sir, there's no trick to getting to do another man's job."

"Start at the beginning," ordered the detective.

The man looked across at his snoring neighbor. He made his thumb and forefinger into a pair of pincers and demonstrated it to Ganelon questioningly. When the detective nodded, the man reached over and applied the pincer to Putiatin's nostrils. The snoring stopped.

With his hand to Putiatin's nose the man continued his story. "I am a poor carter, sir, though years ago, in a traveling show, I wore bright cardboard armor and drove a Roman chariot with five horses abreast, holding the reins in my teeth. But I was a slave to drink. There was this bad accident and I was let go with a limp for a pension. Later I found work as a carter at the Emperor's estate at Tsarskoe Selo. During the wintertime the day before each of these Palm Balls of theirs we would drive the trees to town in a caravan of wagons and two days later we would drive them back."

An outburst of snarls told us that the wolves had reached the coach. Something—it might have been a strong gust of wind—butted against the door. The carter looked from Ganelon to the vodka. Ganelon passed over the bottle. The carter took a long drink before continuing. "Three years ago an old comrade from the traveling-show days, a man named Bunin, asked me if I was above making a little extra on the side. Sometimes I was to work it so I was the last vehicle in the caravan and I was to stop on the outskirts of St. Petersburg, as if one of my team had a stone in its hoof.

"Bunin would come out of the bushes with a suitcase and bring it into the back of the van. After a minute he'd bring it out again. Two days later on my way back we'd do the same thing again. I soon realized I was part of the jewel thefts reported in the newspapers. But the pay was good and the risks seemed small enough.

"Suddenly two weeks ago I read of the arrest of another acquaintance from the traveling-show days. Markov the stone eater. That was his act, sir, swallowing rocks and broken glass and pieces of sardine cans. There's a knack to it. After the show he would regurgitate it all up again. I never cared much for Markov.

"And what was this Bunin's act?" asked Ganelon.

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The carter toasted Ganelon's question with the bottle. "An animal act, sir. A yodeling goat, a dancing pig, a—"

"A monkey," supplied Ganelon bitterly, remembering Orlovsky's smooth "doggy bite" reference.

"A marvel of a monkey, sir. It marched about in a soldier's uniform with a little rifle and a pack on its back." He drank and sputtered with laughter. "Just think about it, sir. There is our Snowman dancing those fast foreign dances with all those beauties and popping the jewels out of their settings like peas out of a pod. And there's the trained monkey following him from palm tree to palm tree under the ceiling. And he feeds the jewels up to it as smooth as glass!"

At that moment Ganelon heard the most blood-curdling sound of his lifetime, the hard relentless claws of a wolf at the ice on the window right beside his head. Vera Orlovsky swallowed a scream.

The carter was too far into his story and his vodka to notice. "When they nabbed Markov," he continued, "I figured Bunin would skip and there'd be no one to lead the police to me. But bold as brass Bunin arrived to say we were doing our number one last time. Well, thought I, why not? Here's my chance to steal the jewels and run before Bunin collects the monkey. So I stopped my van and he put the monkey inside."

The carter shook his head with great distress. "Oh, sir, I should have run when the police shot Bunin the next day. But think of it. Think of all the wealth in that monkey's little pack if only I could wait and collect that last load of trees! Fear and greed struggled together in my brain as our caravan drove into St. Petersburg today. By luck I saw the lieutenant leave the main entrance of the Winter Palace in a droshky as we passed. Chief Double Eagle. I'd never have recognized him if Markov and Bunin hadn't set my mind on those traveling-show days. The young of the well-off sometimes do for adventure what necessity demands of the poor.

"Still, the young gentleman had been a good horseman and a crack shot. He'd gallop into the arena in red Indian warpaint and feathers, shoot a line of twenty kopeck pieces dead-center, and after, when the trick riding was done, he'd bend the coins double and throw them to the crowd. Now there he was wearing the uniform of a fancy regiment."

Here Miss Orlovsky's translation faltered. Ganelon motioned her on. A brief racket of snarls and claws at the coach door gave way to growls and snuffling.

"One look at that officer's face and I knew I'd been beaten to the

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jewels, sir," said the carter. "I jumped down from my van and took off after that droshky, not really knowing what I was going to do. First he stopped at a luggage shop and bought a small green case. Then I followed him into a livery stable yard and stood warming myself at the hostlers' bonfire while he asked about the coach to Kronstadt. From there he went to your hotel. Clearly my bird was about to take flight. But perhaps all was not lost.

"I would take the coachman's place and ransack Chief Double Eagle's luggage on the trip across the ice. Did I say I can drive a team with the reins in my teeth? Imagine how I felt when I discovered that my man wasn't making the trip but the lady here. But then I saw the little green case. I was trying to find out where the jewels were hidden in it when that damned hack troyka spooked the horses and caught me with a mouthful of leather. Some naval officers on their way to a gypsy café, I'll bet. The rest you know, sir."

"And suppose you'd gotten away with it, what would you have done?" demanded Ganelon.

"I'd have signed on a freighter for South America."

"And would you take such a ship right now, tonight?" asked the detective. "Or should we turn you over to Mr. Putiatin here of the Secret Police?"

The horrified carter pulled back his fingers. Putiatin's fierce snoring outburst drew frightened yelps from the departing wolves. "I swear I would sail, sir," said the carter.

Bells swept into earshot. There was a clatter of rifle fire. Soon Lucas' anxious face was in the doorway. On the road he had met two troykas of naval bandsmen delighted to come to the assistance of a Member of the Imperial Society of Amateur Woodwind Virtuosi. And would that worthy gentleman like a wolf-skin trophy? He would not.

An hour and a half later Ganelon was settled in his steam-heated stateroom on board the *Guido Tancredi*, having sworn a mighty oath to Lucas to remain there until they reached the clement waters of the Mediterranean. "I advised Miss Orlovsky to cable her prince," he said. "I expect he'll be there when she disembarks."

"And her brother, sir?" asked Lucas.

"I rather imagine your Wild West show will depart for home with an extra Indian in the troupe." Ganelon settled back in his easy chair and sipped on his glass of hot grog, feeling the satisfaction of a riddle solved. Then he thought of Putiatin. Sobered by the bone-

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chilling ride in the troyka with the baggage, the man would be stamping his feet at the bottom of Miss Orlovsky's gangplank. Ganelon pointed to his furry outerwear heaped on the bed. "Lucas," he said, "please present those superfluous items to Putiatin with my compliments. And don't forget the mittens."

Back in San Sebastiano, Ganelon would scowl darkly, remembering this gesture, for among the accumulated newspapers he would discover a short St. Petersburg item: "Our correspondent reports a deterioration of Sino-Russian relations due to the murder in broad daylight near the Hotel du Nord of Arkady Vassilyitch Putiatin, an agent (posthumous grade) of the Third Section. His assassins, arrested on the spot, are believed to be agents of the Celestial Empire."

They were not. They were members of the Young Fu Brotherhood.

Ganelon threw down the newspaper. When next he and Dr. Ludwig Fong met, the detective pledged he would remember Putiatin.

"Q"

## DETECTIVERSE

*RIDDLE IN RHYME*

*by FRANCIS M. NEVINS, JR.*

John Masefield saw an English truck
When he was in a hungry state.
Do you know what John Masefield did?
Why, friends, the poet laureate.

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a ***NEW*** short story by

**DONALD OLSON**

*Is something new and different happening these days to married men in their sixties? Consider Norman Lessard: seemingly resigned to a life of retirement in sunny Florida, Norman found that he had a volcano inside him, a volcano that had been dormant for sixty-two years, and now . . .*

# INDIAN SUMMER

***by DONALD OLSON***

From across the room Norman saw her standing on the terrace of the twelfth-floor condominium apartment gazing out over the night-colored Gulf. Stepping softly, he advanced until he stood directly behind her. He put his hands on her shoulders and before she could do more than murmur a startled response he made two movements in quick succession. He pushed her violently forward over the railing, then swiftly raised his hands to cover his ears so as not to hear the cry that must have burst from her throat as she plummeted down, down through the darkness onto the jagged rocks lining the seawall.

But when he dropped his hands, a scream still hung upon the air, uncannily rising instead of falling. Then he realized the sound did not come from her lips; she was already dead by then and what he heard was only the startled cry of a seagull.

That was how it ended. It had begun a few months earlier, or possibly years earlier depending on one's point of view in such matters. On a cool spring evening Norman Lessard and his wife Janet sat side by side in chairs on the terrace, relaxing after one of Janet's

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dietary dinners for two, which she cleverly contrived to make as palatable as a gourmet repast.

Although Norman, not unlike many long-wed husbands, occasionally indulged in murderous thoughts, he could not on that evening remotely have conceived the possibility that within a short time he would, in fact, commit murder.

"Be a dear, Normie, and fetch me my wrap," said Janet. "We're in for another chilly night, I fear." And she added, in a tone of reproof aimed personally at Norman, "Canadian air."

"How do you know it's not from Alaska?" he retorted.

Both being American citizens, who had met and married in Detroit and retired to Florida twenty years earlier, this quibble was as pointless as Janet's reproach, but Janet seemed to delight in disparaging anything Canadian, Norman having been born and brought up in western Ontario.

"Maybe it has something to do with Mt. St. Helens," offered Norman, and then, aping Janet's tone, "*American* volcano."

"Nonsense. How could that affect our weather down here?"

"Harmonic tremors."

"What?"

"Seismological term. I heard it on TV." He smiled to himself. Harmonic tremors. He liked the phrase, choosing to apply it to that state of continual domestic bickering that had characterized his and Janet's relationship for the past several years. That mild, passionless wrangling that did no more than disturb the surface of lives that were essentially in harmony.

Janet sighed. "Well, are you going to fetch my wrap or must I sit here and shiver?" That sort of thing. "And while you're in there give Micky his pill."

As dogs went, Micky himself was rather a pill in Norman's opinion. But then he despised poodles. They weren't a man's dog. Giving dogs tranquilizers was ridiculous, Norman thought. He and Janet had enjoyed more than a few squabbles about that.

Norman performed this chore and allowed Micky to follow him back to the terrace, where instead of putting on her sweater Janet perversely wrapped it around Micky and cuddled him in her arms.

"I thought you were the one who was cold," said Norman.

"The sweater will keep Micky warm and Micky will keep me warm. Won't you, sweetheart? You do love your mistress, don't you?"

Mistress. The word started a pleasurable tingling in Norman's veins, similar to that of a quick belt of Scotch on a chilly evening.

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His gaze drifted furtively toward the wall separating their terrace from the adjoining one. Not that the woman in the neighboring apartment was his mistress. Oh, no, nothing of the sort. His feelings for Sylvia Farrar had not yet reached such dizzy heights of the imagination. Such a thought would have been as incredible to him as the thought that within a counted number of weeks he would become a murderer.

He had met their new neighbor while taking his morning jog along the beach adjoining Sundown Point, that sugar-white cube of apartments where he and Janet had resided ever since coming to Florida. Part of his pleasure in jogging lay in the *dis*pleasure it caused Janet, for whom two laps of the pool was all the exercise she ever got. That the doctor had declared him fit for jogging as long as he didn't overdo it did not satisfy Janet, who refused to believe jogging was safe for any man who had ever suffered even a mild heart attack, as Norman had many years ago. She fussed over Norman as endlessly as she fussed over Micky. It was a constant source of irritation to Norman.

On that morning which was to have such a profound effect on Norman's future, he had noticed the other solitary jogger running ahead of him. The figure revealed in her T-shirt and running shorts was the sort that would not have gone unnoticed by any man, even one of Norman's age, which was sixty-two. A young sixty-two, everyone agreed. He could easily pass for fifty-two—maybe even forty-nine wearing his toupee, which Janet took every opportunity of ridiculing. Male vanity at *his* age. What was he trying to prove?

There was no question that Florida living had produced a more beneficial effect, physically, on Norman than on Janet. His own figure was still firm and leanly muscled, the slight potbelly now flat as a teenager's. Not that Janet had gone to seed by any means. Unfortunately in her case, exposure to all that sun had left her with a dried-up appearance. Her face had become prunish and leathery, scribbled with a network of fine wrinkles. And she insisted on wearing her white hair in a short-cropped style giving her the look, to Norman, of an aging actress unwisely attempting to play Peter Pan. Sometimes he thought it possible people might even suspect Janet of being his mother.

On that first morning Norman had been pleasantly surprised to discover that he and the female jogger had the same destination—the pool at Sundown Point. In a bathing suit her figure was indeed spectacular. Alone together in the pool, it was inevitable they should start chatting.

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Norman had assumed she might be one of the other tenants' daughters from out of town, but he was wrong. "I'm here alone," smiled Sylvia Farrar, showing perfect white teeth in a wide Lauren Bacallish mouth. "The Carberrys lent me their apartment for three months while they're in Europe. We're neighbors in Manhattan."

"But they're right next door to us," cried Norman. "We're in 1207."

"How *nice*," replied Sylvia Farrar warmly.

"I knew you couldn't possibly *live* here," said Norman gallantly. "No one under fifty lives here. For that matter neither does anyone over fifty."

She looked puzzled. Norman laughed without humor. "We're from Detroit originally, Janet and I. Now Detroit is not, I'm sure, anyone's idea of heaven on earth, but people *do* live there. It's a heck of a lot more stimulating than Mandalay Beach." And he found Sylvia Farrar such a good listener he was soon pouring into her exquisite ear all his favorite gripes. How people never talked about anything but the weather and their health; how after a year or two the sameness of the seasons produced a narcotic, stultifying effect on the mind; how everyone seemed as insulated as zombies from the economic, political, and cultural pulse of the nation.

"My wife's idea of cultural activities is making jewelry out of buttons. Jewelry, dog collars, lampshades—you name it. The men fish and play golf and read *The Wall Street Journal* and grow fat."

"Well, *you* certainly aren't guilty of that," murmured Sylvia Farrar, plainly admiring the youthful vigor of his physique as they sat chatting beside the pool.

"I try to keep myself fit," Norman replied modestly, trying not to beam.

During that first conversation Norman learned that Sylvia Farrar was an ex-model, now more interested in photography from behind the camera, and that she was emerging from the aftershock of a traumatic divorce. "Believe me," she said, "peace and tranquillity are precisely what I need right now. And solitude."

This last remark caused Norman to fear he might have gone a bit overboard in bending Sylvia Farrar's ear. He quickly apologized and got up to leave. Her lovely slim hand detained him.

"Oh, no. I didn't mean that, Norman. May I call you Norman?"

"Please do. Just don't ever call me Normie. My wife calls me Normie. I hate it."

"Then why does she?"

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"That's why," he said, aware that he was being meanly disloyal to Janet.

Accustomed as he was to Janet's parrot-like squawk, Norman found Sylvia Farrar's laughter pure enchantment. "Now tell me the truth," she teased him. "I'll bet there was a time when you adored it."

Norman nearly blushed under his tan. "Maybe I did. Once." There were a lot of things he had felt differently about, once.

"But if you dislike it so much down here why do you stay?"

"There's nothing to go back to. My son is a professor in Southern California. I'm retired. You see, I had this bronchial condition and the doctor advised a change of climate. I'm okay now, but Janet wouldn't dream of leaving here. She loves it." He saw no reason to mention that trifling heart attack.

"Well, I must confess," said Sylvia Farrar, "it's not *my* idea of a prison."

Norman looked across at the seawall, thought of all the signs posted against trespassers, of the sophisticated security precautions, and of the gate across the entrance drive which was not lifted until the guard on duty was satisfied of one's identity.

It was only later, when they had become better acquainted, that Sylvia confessed an envy of anyone who could afford to live in a place like Sundown Point. "You mean you couldn't?" Norman asked her.

"If the Carberrys hadn't been so kind I'd scarcely have been able to rent a motel room."

"But I thought high-fashion models—"

"Lived like movie stars? Some of them do. I did, myself, once. Until I made a very bad investment."

"Oh?"

"In my husband. Guy was a wheeler-dealer—and madly attractive. Only he wheeled and dealed with my money. And modeling is about as long-lived a career as boxing. I'm over the hill, Norman. I can't go back to that."

The notion of Sylvia Farrar being in any sense of the term over the hill made Norman laugh. But Janet quickly set him straight on that score. "Oh, she's lovely, I grant you, Normie. But Sylvia Farrar will never see thirty-five again. And if she's not within spitting distance of forty I'd better get my glasses changed."

Maybe so, but Sylvia Farrar had and would always have, Norman thought to himself, what his boyhood chums in Highwood Park had

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called "real class." Those bones, that shape. The style and understated elegance of even her most casual attire.

Furthermore, Sylvia was clearly as determined as Norman not to lose the struggle against aging without putting up a battle. And that Sylvia did not treat him as if he were an old man inspired Norman to even greater efforts in that struggle. How delightful it was to have a companion! He ran farther and farther each morning with Sylvia beside him. He spent more time in the pool. He resumed his daily calisthenics.

"For heaven's sake, Normie," Janet protested as he huffed and puffed on the carpet in their bedroom, straining for that fiftieth push-up, "*What* are you trying to prove?"

"Janet, will you please stop asking me that silly question?"

"Keeping fit is all well and good, my dear. I couldn't be more pleased. But you can't turn back the clock. You're a *senior citizen* for mercy's sake."

For the first time he really lost his temper. "Don't you *ever* use that expression to me again. Not ever, do you hear?"

She uttered a derisive hoot of parrot-laughter. "Oh, act your age, Normie. You'll never see thirty-five again either. *Or* forty, as the case may be."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You know what it means."

"Like hell I do."

"Oh, Normie, you're so trans*parent*. Ever since that ex-model or whatever she is moved in next door you've been acting like Johnny Weismuller. Well, take my advice, dear. *Don't* wear your toupee in the swimming pool. You tried that once, remember?"

Murderous thoughts. Norman felt a tightness in his chest and a rapid pulsebeat in his temple. He stormed into the living room and switched on the TV. A newscaster was again describing the situation at Mt. St. Helens where seismologists were expecting the volcano to erupt in the foreseeable future. Although Norman was not ordinarily prone to self-analysis he was still acutely aware of his own thought processes; he realized that those harmonic tremors rippling beneath the surface of his consciousness were generated by something more profound than the vain desire to impress a younger woman with his masculinity.

Janet's use of that odious term, senior citizen, had come closer to the truth. At times Norman felt an overpowering sense of regret at all that he had missed in life. He sometimes felt that he had never

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truly been young. Obliged to forego college and take a job while still in high school, he had missed out on so many of the frivolous joys of young manhood, had seldom dated, and until he met Janet, the daughter of one of the top executives in the automotive plant where Norman worked, he had actually never known another woman intimately. When Janet's father died, his sizable stock holdings had passed to Janet and were the foundation for the comfortable lifestyle they had enjoyed ever since.

He supposed, in truth, that he had always admired Janet more than he had loved her. Admired her strength of character, her air of brisk efficiency, her domestic talents. Despite their differences she was easy to live with and, he had to be honest, to lean on. As was her money. Yet Janet had scarcely a pinch of romance in her nature—romance, that is, as Norman conceived the word; his own definition of romance had remained vague, as it probably would have remained had he not met Sylvia Farrar. That first time he had wandered down to the pool at night and seen her face, pale and ravishing as a goddess' in the moonlight, his definition of romance had become crystallized.

It was, although he never would have suspected it, the sort of belated infection of the senses that could turn a man like him into a murderer.

Sylvia Farrar had made Norman feel young again, or rather, young for the first time. It might be said that the feeling assumed, in Norman's case, pathological proportions. He would likely have passed the crisis point and spent the remainder of his life free of that eventual compulsion to kill had Sylvia Farrar spent a shorter vacation than she did at Sundown Point. The harmonic tremors might gradually have receded. The volcano might never have erupted. No, certainly he would never have murdered.

However, now that Sylvia had become the touchstone against which he could measure Janet's shortcomings in the romance department, he found himself more than ever aware of his wife's jarring mannerisms and her smugly superior air of being so much wiser than her husband. What caused Norman the greatest irritation was his secret awareness that Janet *was* wiser. More in touch with realities. Practical, and without delusions about herself or Norman. Time and again she had demonstrated this, and soon she proved it once more.

One morning—Norman and Sylvia were now jogging all the way to the Pavilion at the very tip of Mandalay Key—he suddenly pitched

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forward onto the shell-pebbled sand as they were nearly back to their starting point.

"Oh, Norman," wailed Sylvia, fluttering about him ineffectually, "what *is* it? Is it your heart?"

"No!" he cried, enraged by the indignity of such a suggestion. "It's my knee." If it were his heart would he be clutching his leg so desperately?

As it happened, Janet had seen what happened from the kitchen window of their apartment and was at his side so quickly one might have thought she possessed more than just Peter Pan's hair style. She soon had the situation in hand and with Sylvia's help managed to get Norman to his feet and up to the apartment. She rang for the doctor who happened to occupy an apartment on the third floor. It was nothing serious, he reported after examining Norman's knee. The joint had simply rebelled from over-exertion.

"I told you there was nothing wrong in jogging, Norman, even at your age. But you must be sensible about it."

Later Norman was obliged to listen to Janet's complacent I-told-you-so's. "Maybe from now on you'll listen to me. Anyone would have thought you were training for the marathon. Ridiculous!"

This setback put Norman out of action so far as running went, but he was always there beside the pool waiting for Sylvia to join him. It touched him that she ran only half as far in order to spend more time with him. Moreover, it boosted Norman's morale to be told that Sylvia's ex-husband had had the same thing happen to him.

"How old was he?" Norman asked.

"Twenty-eight."

"Ah."

The two most abhorrent topics in the world to Norman were age and hair. He chose to pretend that the first was an illusion and that the other, in his case, was not. But now he felt moved to broach one of these topics.

"Sylvia, would you be offended if I asked how old you are?"

"That depends," she replied, "on whether you mean my chronological or my biological age. I believe one's true age is determined by how one looks and feels."

"My philosophy exactly," declared Norman. "I, for instance—especially when I'm with you—don't feel a day over forty."

"You don't *look* a day older. Chronological age is a myth."

"A delusion."

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"Meaningless."

"Some people age more swiftly than others," he said.

"It's a biological fact," she agreed, and then, "Maybe I shouldn't ask, but is your wife *very* much older than you?"

Norman could not have been more flattered. "Not so *very* much."

"Oh? I would have thought she was."

Norman sighed. "Sylvia, I can't tell you what a joy it's been having someone younger to talk to for a change."

"I feel the same way—I mean about having someone a bit older to talk to." She looked out over the Gulf. "I should never have married Guy. He was younger than I. In so many ways. I feel—I don't know—more comfortable. Safer. With a more mature man."

Their eyes met and exchanged smiles of mutual satisfaction.

"Janet keeps harping on the importance of acting one's age. In every respect—if you see what I mean. It's as if someone told her, look, you're no longer a young girl, you shouldn't feel like one. Well, damn it all, Sylvia, I *feel* like a young man. So why shouldn't I behave like one?"

"Frankly, Norman, I think it was a mistake for you to move down here. But still there's no reason to vegetate. Surely you could afford to spend a few weeks in New York or somewhere more stimulating every year."

"Easily. But I can't budge Janet out of her rut."

"Pity."

Sylvia regarded Norman with her wide lustrous blue eyes. "Promise not to laugh if I confess something to you? A sort of fantasy of mine?"

"Indeed I won't laugh. We all have our fantasies. Thank God."

She averted her gaze, allowing him the bliss of studying her gemlike profile. "I sometimes dream of being married to an older man. Someone sensible and kind and caring. Like my daddy. Only not someone who would *act* like a father, you know. Someone young in heart. And body."

Possibly it was at that precise moment that murder became inevitable.

"You could meet someone like that, surely," said Norman, positively tingling inside.

"Yes, but I don't mean some lecherous old sugar-daddy type. Although, to be frank, it would have to be someone with a fair amount of money."

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Norman didn't dare continue the conversation. As food for the imagination it was somehow *too* nourishing, too rich.

Still, murder might yet have been avoided had something unexpected not intervened the very next day to bring fantasy several giant steps closer to reality. Norman's son John was offered a chance to attend a seminar at a Middle Eastern university and he wrote to ask if Norman and Janet could come to California to watch over the two grandchildren so that John's wife could accompany him.

"But I don't want to go to California," Norman protested, in that tone of voice that anyone but himself would have called babyish. Leave Sylvia? Unthinkable.

"Funny," said Janet, peering at him as if he might be unwell. "You're the one who keeps whining about being in a rut."

"Baby-sitting for a month is not my idea of getting out of a rut."

"Well, suit yourself. I for one am going."

Norman felt, mixed with a sense of elation, a vague, unaccountable apprehension. "And leave me to fend for myself?"

"Don't worry. I'll show you how to use a can opener."

"Very funny."

"I'll regret it, I know. I'm sure you'll sit up till all hours, and forget to give Micky his medication."

"Good lord, Janet, I'm not a child. I have *some* will power, you know."

"Question is, do you have any *won't* power?"

"I think we'll survive. Won't die of malnutrition or loneliness."

"Oh, no danger of your being lonely. Not with Miss Cover Girl next door."

He tried not to show his agitation. "I hope you know me better than that."

She gave him a sage and penetrating look. "Yes, my dear, I do know you better than that. I wonder, though, if you know yourself."

"Meaning what?"

"Normie, we've had a pretty good life together, all things considered. Oh, we do our share of bickering. And I know we don't see eye to eye on a lot of things. But I do hope you wouldn't delude yourself to the point of doing anything . . . foolish."

"In what way?"

"In any way. I know how you feel about getting old. But, my dear, it's inevitable. Sooner or later you must face that fact. Don't make it harder on yourself than it has to be."

This unusually intimate manner of speaking left Norman ill at

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ease, even embarrassed, and for a couple of days after Janet had left he avoided Sylvia Farrar. Being apart from Janet for the first time in so many years created an emotional vacuum. He felt like a child left alone for the first time, instructed to behave himself and avoid temptation so that mommy would be proud of him.

The feeling passed, of course, and once his conscience had been tucked into bed he went a bit too far, too fast. He invited Sylvia to dinner at an expensive restaurant in one of the beach resorts. Live music, a younger crowd, good food and wine.

Still, murder would not have been the ultimate result had discretion not altogether deserted him. To Norman, quite naturally, the final test of youthful manhood had nothing to do with holding the pace while jogging or being able to swim a certain number of laps in the pool.

That night, in Sylvia's apartment: "Norman, we've no right, you know."

Norman finished his second brandy. "You think it's tawdry?"

"Oh, *no*. It would be beautiful. But so far it's been rather perfect in its way. Spiritual companionship. Mutual sympathy. If we let this happen things might never be the same again."

They did, and things weren't. It was a far greater success than Norman had dreamed possible. A sort of physical and spiritual epiphany. It was like shedding a skin that had become, despite his efforts, encrusted with tiny telltale barnacles of age and despair. And afterward it was as if all the good times, all the exuberance of youth had been magically recaptured and everything he had missed had been handed to him as a belated gift by penitent gods.

For a month he lived in a paradise of self-affirmation. It all left him dizzy. Yes, even physically dizzy, although this didn't worry him for a minute. Wasn't it natural under the circumstances?

Even at this point murder might not have been the inescapable consequence had Norman had the sense to regard his actions as a more sophisticated man might have done. As a harmless month's fling. An interlude. A spell of Indian summer weather before the dreaded onset of winter. Only Sylvia was not spending just a month at Sundown Point. In this case, therefore, it was not absence but presence that made the heart grow fonder.

Neither of them mentioned the word love. Love may have been inapplicable to what developed between them. Romance, yes. Tenderness, surely. Sympathy, oh, absolutely. And desperation. Desperation inspired by diverse factors, but nonetheless desperation.

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"Sylvia, what will you do when you go back to New York?" he asked her late one night.

She reacted with a shudder. "Who knows? I can't afford to keep up the apartment. I've no training for a decent job. My photography's still only a hobby. In time it might amount to something, but it's terrifically expensive."

Her helplessness infected him with a deep and caring sympathy. That fantasy could have been transformed into this degree of reality was incredibly marvelous. Was it possible it might be carried even further? Oh, to live in a permanent state of such rapture—

Norman found himself making a proposal that even a month earlier would have appalled his sense of propriety.

"Sylvia, please don't take what I'm going to say in the wrong spirit, but I must say it. I happen to know that the apartment directly below yours is vacant. If you'd care to stay on here, that is if you wouldn't die of boredom, I'd be more than happy to take it for you. The owner wants to rent it for the summer. I mean we could keep on seeing each other—"

The amusement in her eyes implied none of the scorn he had feared. "Be your mistress, you mean?"

"Don't make it sound sordid, please, Sylvia. You can't possibly know how miserable I'd be if you went away."

"It would be just as hard on me," she confessed warmly.

"Then?"

She groped for the right words. "I won't deny it's a strong temptation. But, no, I couldn't. Maybe it has something to do with self-respect. You see, Norman, when I came down here it was because I'd lost my sense of self-respect. I couldn't bear the person I'd become. I want to be strong and self-reliant. What you're proposing frightens me. I don't want to lean on anyone. Not like that. I want to be part of someone's life—but not a part-time part, if you see what I mean."

Could she actually mean what her words implied? There was only one way to find out. "Then let me ask you another question. Suppose—suppose I were free to marry you. Would that idea be as repellent?"

She took a long time answering. "No. It wouldn't be repellent at all. Only you're not free."

"But you're saying that if I *were* you would marry me?"

"Yes, Norman, I would."

Thus did murder become inescapable.

"Then I shall be free."

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"Oh, Norman, are you saying you would divorce Janet? For me?"

"Yes!"

Emotionally intoxicated, he refused to picture the look on Janet's face when he confronted her with such a shock. Even more to the point, he refused to consider the practical consequences of such an act. He had implicitly promised Sylvia the same sort of lifestyle that he and Janet had enjoyed for so many years. He had never told her that it was mostly Janet's money that made that life possible. A divorce would not leave him wholly penniless, but there would be no Sundown Point in his and Sylvia's future. But such trappings were unnecessary, he felt sure. True, Sylvia had said that the man she married would have to have a fair amount of money, and he would have a *fair* amount. Enough, that is, so they could live in modest comfort.

No, Norman did not choose to think of these mundane considerations. He was already out of touch with such realities. He was spellbound, enchanted, desperate.

For the remainder of that month he and Sylvia lived in a make-believe world. They made plans. They were happy as children.

Janet took one look at Norman when he met her at the airport and spent no time billing and cooing and rattling on about how she had missed him.

"Normie, you look dreadful. Are you ill?"

This time his balloon was stronger than her needle. "Of course I'm not ill. I've never felt better."

"Then why are you so flushed? And your eyes look funny. Haven't you been sleeping?"

"For pity's sake, Janet, I'm *fine*. Just a few dizzy spells."

This confession popped out of his mouth involuntarily. Only habit could have accounted for it, or perhaps it was the sheer physical need to share some private anxiety which he could have shared only with Janet. Certainly not with Sylvia, from whom all signs of weakness or debility must be hidden for the sake of his masculine pride.

Janet said no more but whisked Norman off to the doctor's office the day after she arrived home. Norman didn't like the frown that settled on the doctor's face.

"I don't know what you've been doing, Norman, but your blood pressure's not at all what I'd like to see."

"Rubbish. I feel great."

"Danger signals are danger signals. Not worrying about anything, are you?"

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"What would I have to worry about?"

Janet took charge. "Leave him to me, Doctor. One month out of my sight and the poor man falls apart. I'm sure he's been burying his food in salt and overdoing the martini bit."

Norman blamed Janet for the sudden depression of his spirits. Her coddling and fussing had reduced him from a man of forty to a doddering invalid in twenty-four hours. Why couldn't she leave him alone?

They resumed their old routine, only now Norman really did feel as if he were in prison—and in the hospital ward at that. Thank God for Sylvia. For long walks on the beach and mornings beside the pool.

"Have you told her?" Sylvia inquired one morning.

Norman fidgeted. "Not yet."

"Why not?"

He said he was waiting for the right opportunity. "My son and his family are coming to visit us for a week before John goes back to work. I can't possibly spring this on her until after they've gone."

"But, Norman, I've only three weeks left."

"Don't worry."

"There won't be any problem, will there? With Janet?"

"No," he lied. "There won't be any problem."

John and his family arrived. It was all very sentimental and nostalgic. The kids told him how great he looked. Peter Pan smirked and beamed and taught the little girls how to make button necklaces. The whole cozy family bit. For the first time Norman was frightened. The disruption of his life now loomed forbiddingly. And yet it was inescapable. He simply had to be strong and resolute.

But how could he tell her? How could he put it into words? And how could he tell Sylvia there would be difficulties? All this worry was having a bad effect on him. He had trouble sleeping and his heart had again begun playing tricks on him. The more Janet fussed over him the worse he felt. The woman would kill him with her infernal mollycoddling. He hated her. Hated the very sight of her.

Sylvia grew more restive. Why hadn't he told Janet? Was he keeping something from her? "You haven't changed your mind, have you, Norman?"

"As if I ever could."

A future with Sylvia seemed now his only salvation. But to qualify his promises of the good life would take more courage than it was

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taking to ask Janet for a divorce. Such a confession could only lower him in Sylvia's esteem, and that he couldn't bear.

"Then you must face it," she said. "Janet must be told."

"Please, Sylvia, don't nag. I get enough of that at home. 'Normie, don't strain your eyes. Normie, not so much salt. Normie, it's time for bed.' "

"Poor darling," cooed Sylvia. "It's only because she loves you, I suppose. Without you she would have no one."

Astonishingly, he had not thought of that part of it at all. Janet was such a tower of strength, so self-reliant, so sensible. He tried to think of her alone, with only Micky to fuss and fret over. Better she should be dead.

He thought about Janet dead. If she were dead she wouldn't be lonely. If she were dead there would be no need for a divorce. No concern about money or a reduced lifestyle.

"I'll tell her tonight," Norman promised Sylvia the next morning at poolside.

She gazed at him fondly but with a look, he thought, disturbingly like Janet's, as if she weren't altogether sure she could depend on him. "You mustn't be weak, Norman," she urged.

It was true, he told himself. I am weak. I've always been weak. This will be my last chance to prove I can be strong.

He went upstairs to find Janet watching TV as she strung colored buttons on a length of fishing twine. "They think Mt. St. Helens might blow its stack again," she said. "Did you see it on TV when it erupted?" This had happened while Janet was in California. "All that destruction. Unbelievable. Lives destroyed. Acres of countryside. Terrible. I suppose the people who were killed simply never believed it would happen."

"It had to happen," Norman said gloomily. "Sooner or later."

The image of the mountain, as it had been pictured on TV, troubled his mind as he took Micky for a walk that night. Just sitting there, he pondered, serene, peaceful, for decades. While deep inside those gradually increasing tremors and dislocations. Until finally the explosion, leaving destruction and human misery in its aftermath.

He found himself shuffling along the sidewalk, almost like an old man. He wondered how long his heart could stand all this inner turmoil and uncertainty. But it was the possible death of his pride that was even more to be dreaded. He knew now that he could never ask Janet for a divorce. Nor could he bear the idea of facing Sylvia and telling her that if he did divorce Janet they would be obliged

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to live on a vastly reduced scale. Oh, that he couldn't bear—to lose Sylvia's esteem was unthinkable.

There was only one way out of the dilemma.

He stood looking up at the lighted tiers of windows and terraces of Sundown Point. He thought of Janet sitting on the terrace, and of Sylvia waiting in her apartment for word that he had found the manly courage to break the news to Janet.

He entered the gate and walked around to the seawall. He looked down at the surf crashing against the rocks, then up again at the terrace. He thought of Janet waiting to fuss and scold and coddle him for the rest of his life. He thought of Sylvia waiting to create the illusion that he was still a young man.

He had to prove he was strong.

He tethered Micky's leash to the leg of the poolside table. He looked around to be sure no one saw him, then he entered the building by the service door and took the service elevator to the twelfth floor. It was the longest, most self-revealing journey he had ever taken.

Fifteen minutes later he walked into the apartment, squared his shoulders, and tried to assume a casual manner as her voice called out to him:

"Normie? Did you hear anything a few minutes ago? I was watching TV and thought I heard a scream."

"It was nothing," he replied. "Only a seagull, most likely."

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**a *NEW* short story by**

**THOMAS WALSH**

*Leon had plotted the job to the last tiny detail. The plan was foolproof—nothing could go wrong. As an extra precaution, he made sure that no one knew anything about the other three, not even their names. "That's the beauty of it, see?" This last big one, and Leon would be home free—free to start a new and happy life with his new girl . . .*

# LEON'S LAST JOB

***by THOMAS WALSH***

Leon knew at once, the moment he got home, that somehow or other his wife LaVerne must have found out about his new girl Janice. How? Through whom? But that he did not know, and all he could do was to accept with dogged silence the shrill and venomous feminine abuse that LaVerne poured over him.

She called him everything in the book, as she always did on such occasions. A dirty, rotten two-timer, Leon heard; a degenerate; a descendant of unmarried parents. But she'd fix him this time, and she'd fix him once and for all. He'd never get the chance to walk out on her again, because now she'd walk out on him first. She'd show him something. Just wait and see. Did he hear? This time he wasn't through with her, but LaVerne was through with him. This time he'd see, all right. This time he'd . . .

It went on and on. There was no stopping her. But then Leon had let her get the whip hand over him years ago, when they were first married, and now there was no changing that. Even when he tried to sneak out of the house at twelve midnight, she heard that in the bedroom and raced out into the hall after him, still ranting and raving.

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So it was a great relief to get downstairs, away from her, and fix his thoughts on his new life with Janice out on the coast, if only he played his cards right. Then how could he miss? There was not a catch anywhere that Leon could see. First of all, the other three men wouldn't know him, just as he wouldn't know them, so that part of it was really perfect. And it was perfect because, if anything happened to go wrong tonight and one of them got himself picked up, what would he know about the others? What could he tell? Even if he wanted to save himself by turning rat and copping a plea, there would be no useful information about the other men that he could pass on to the cops.

He wouldn't be able to furnish their names and addresses, for instance, just as they wouldn't be able to furnish his. Often enough Leon had been burned by someone he would have trusted with his last dollar, but never again. This would be the last job of his career for Leon, as well as the biggest, and he had taken great pains in setting it up. Cheap punk, was he? Well, they would see about that, or at least Leon would. He'd show LaVerne, all right—or rather he wouldn't. It would have to stay all bottled up in himself, unfortunately, for his own satisfaction. That was the smart thing to do, and for once in his life Leon was going to do things the smart way. LaVerne was getting fat as a pig anyway, whereas Janice—

He dreamed happily about Janice, but put her also out of his thoughts after he had turned north on Third Avenue. Now check everything again, he cautioned himself, one last time, just in case. Snowing, was it? Okay, then. Pick up a couple of new snow tires, so that he'd be able to keep the car going, no matter how bad the weather got. He pulled way over into the right, the slow lane, and at the next corner he slowed down, peering ahead for the man called Philadelphia.

And Philly was right where he should be, ready and waiting. The moment he spotted Leon's white sedan, which he had been told to watch for, he moved toward it with an overnight bag in his right hand.

"In the trunk with that," Leon ordered, passing him the key. "We got a couple of more guys to pick up, friend. Then get in the back seat. Kind of cold night, ain't it?"

Philadelphia didn't say anything. He was a short fat man about forty, and like a true professional he did exactly what he was told. He unlocked the trunk, and for a few seconds was out of sight behind it with the trunk top hoisted up between him and Leon. Then he

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slammed the top down, got in the back seat, and returned the trunk key to Leon.

At another bus stop a few blocks farther on they picked up L.A., a small slim man who showed them nothing but an Aztec stolidity of expression. Brown, he was. Brown face, brown shoes, brown clothes, brown gloves. He also had a small suitcase, and put it into the trunk when Leon told him to. Then he came around to the passenger side of the car, and got in beside Philadelphia, on the back seat.

The third man they picked up, Detroit, was tall and gangly. He had lean cheeks with noticeable hollows in them, big bony hands, and apparently a perpetual snuffle. Almost at once he showed Leon that he was not going to be so easy to handle as the other two. From the first second, whatever the reason, he must have been primed for trouble. After putting his suitcase in the trunk, he bent his head forward and peered at everyone inside, one by one, taking all the time in the world about it.

"Hey, pal," he said then, in a hoarse, rasping voice, and while dropping his cigarette onto the road. "Ought to tell you something right now. One thing I can't stand is anybody at all riding in back of me. Know why? Lost the best friend I ever had in that way, guy I met out in Joliet years ago, Old Jolly—Jack Nolan. So I think we better reshuffle here. You mind? Let's shift you around here a minute. Just in case."

And with that he pulled the lapels of the brown overcoat together, and in the same motion, with just one hand, lifted their owner out and up from the back seat. It was finished and done before L.A. could put up any effective resistance.

By the time he had recovered himself, L.A. was standing out in the road, and Detroit was in the back of the car. Looking in at him, L.A. spat out something very softly in Spanish. Leon didn't know what it was, but all the same he felt very glad that it had not been directed at him.

"Now come on," he urged, opening the front door for L.A. "He didn't mean nothin' by that. Get in here, will you? We got people watching."

And after a moment L.A. did get in the front seat, staring silently, with narrowed eyes and an ominous, heavy thickness around the lips, his back to Detroit.

"And you," Leon blustered, turning his head. "Don't start pushing your weight around here. We know you're a hard guy, sure, but then

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we're all hard guys, so let's just see if we can't take that for granted. You don't have to prove nothin' to us, we don't have to prove nothin' to you. Okay?"

"Second that," Philadelphia said, watching Detroit. Philly's overcoat was open and one hand was under it. "Do what the man said. Shut your mouth and don't start anything."

"Oh?" Detroit said, eyeing him grimly. "What did you figure I got to start, Fatso?"

"Now I told you to cut that out," Leon ordered him furiously. "You were hired to do a job with us, and we ain't even started on it yet."

"Worse than that," Detroit said. "You just reminded me. I ain't even been told what it is yet."

Leon got his voice back under control, though it required some effort. It was a bad start. They hadn't been together two minutes yet, and already Detroit had them all at one another's throats. Distrust, suspicion, antagonism had already been created, and something had better be done about it. He pulled away from the curb shakily, and at the next corner turned right for the East River Drive.

"You'll be told," he growled at Detroit out of the side of his mouth. "But don't start pushing, that's all. We'll eat somewhere along the road, and you'll be told then, all of you. Wait just about fifteen or twenty minutes, can't you? Then you'll know."

But Detroit had stirred up the barrel, all right, because now he had them all edgy. Philadelphia was darting quick, uneasy glances at Detroit and L.A., his hand still under his coat; L.A. was staring straight ahead through the windshield with his lips a little drawn back, as if he were still whispering to himself; and Detroit was constantly shifting his bleak gray eyes from one to the other of them with obvious, very wary suspicion. Not an overly sensitive man, Leon still got the idea that somehow the atmosphere in the car had changed to one of savagely palpable menace.

Who the hell had they sent him from Detroit, anyway? A psycho? Someone who might blow the whole thing wide-open on them? Now everyone in the car sat perfectly still, not a word uttered, but with their eyes moving constantly in quick side-to-side darts, and Leon could feel the back of his neck beginning to crawl. He could not think of anything at all to say, though he wanted to very much. But somewhere up near Yonkers he found what he was looking for—a dingy bar and grill, and next door to it an all-night service station. He pulled in there.

"Going to get something to eat next door," he told the gas at-

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tendant. "Be about an hour, I guess. Think you can slap on a couple of snow tires by the time we come back?"

"Sure can," he was promised. "I'll put Joe here right to work on it. Hey, Joe!"

In the bar there was only one morose beer drinker watching the hockey game, and in the restaurant there was no one at all, just the way Leon wanted it. A middle-aged waitress brought their drinks, then waddled off to the kitchen with their food orders. So at last Leon got down to brass tacks, and although they were all alone in the dining room he first lowered his voice cautiously.

"Now I guess this is what you're all waiting to hear," he began, watching the kitchen door to be sure the waitress had not come back. "Okay, then. Here it is. There's a little town about fifty miles north, up near the Catskills, where my wife's family lives. So one night about a week ago I drive her and her mother in to the store there, and I'm in my car waiting for them to come out when I see a fellow I know. But he doesn't see me because I'm in my car already, so he doesn't pay any attention when I pull out of the lot right after him and follow him to a house way the hell and gone out in the country, where I figure he lives.

"But of course I play it real cute. I don't follow him too close in case he's spotted me, but just keep on going, and then come back again five minutes later, when I see his car is still in the driveway.

"The next day, now that I'm pretty sure where he lives, I ask around town about him. You know, dropping into a gin mill here and there, talking to guys, and finding out everything I can about him, which ain't much, because it seems like he keeps to himself all the time and never mixes in with the people up there. All I find out is that he and two other guys are living in the house, and they keep it quiet as a graveyard.

"And that's when I get the idea, see, if only I can come up with a little help from fellows like you. I happen to know the guy, like I said, so I figure it's all there ready and waiting for us. His name is Little Raoul something, and I know what his racket is, I know that he's pushing the stuff, and now, by dumb luck, I've found out where he's pushing it from.

"For a couple of days then I keep watching his place from back in the woods, till I even know what color socks he and his friends put on in the morning. They never leave the house empty. If one of them goes out, or two of them, there's one always stays behind to keep watch.

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"Watch on what? But that ain't no problem. If Little Raoul is dealing in drugs, which I know he is, that house must be where he keeps all his supply, right? Well, I guess you fellows know what a pound of heroin is worth these days, just a pound. If you don't, let me tell you that one ounce of the good stuff, street value, is worth at least—"

"And you figure on taking Little Raoul's setup over?" Detroit demanded, leaning forward across the table and speaking much louder than Leon wanted him to speak. "You must be nuts. If we did, not one of us would be around tomorrow morning. That business is organized a hell of a lot tighter than rum running was during Prohibition. They've got all the money in the world dropping into their hands, and they're not letting anybody spoil that kind of a setup for them, why should they? So if we move in on them, they'll—"

"Did I say anything about moving in on them?" Leon inquired caustically. Big mouth again; he should have known. "What I'm telling you is that we can hit his house tonight, take care of Little Raoul and his two buddies before they even know what's happening, get hold of all the heroin they got on hand, and run a real smooth in-and-out operation that won't take even half an hour. Afterwards there ain't anybody in the whole world who's going to know we did it to them, and the way I look at the thing they ain't never going to find out, either."

"Yeah, the way you look at it," Detroit drawled. "Easy as pie, ain't it? But I kind of like to know the kind of guys I'm working with, and so far I don't know even one name here, see what I mean?"

"Right," Leon said, drawling back at him, even more truculently, "Two hundred percent correct, buster, and what's more you ain't ever going to know one name. That's just how I'm running this thing.

"We'll hit the house tonight, we'll grab off all of Little Raoul's stock that we can find, and then we'll drive straight back to the city to a fellow I know. He'll pay us off cash on the line, top market price for whatever we give him, and we already discussed that part, so it's all set. And I guarantee to you, from what I know of Little Raoul's business, and the price of heroin, a four-way split should pay off each of us something like two hundred or maybe two hundred and fifty grand.

"Then what, if you're still worryin'? Then we all go our own way, that's what—and we still don't know each other. That's the beauty of it, see? There's just no way for Little Raoul's friends to find out who did the thing, which is the way I told you I figured it to go right

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from the beginning. I don't know you, you don't know me, and the same thing all around the table here. So one of us happens to get caught, what can he say about the others? The cops, or Little Raoul's buddies, can rip his guts out and he can't tell them a damned thing, because he don't know a damned thing. You understand now the way I arranged it all just like this, do you? Or do you still figure that you've got something to complain about?"

"Just as long as I know what the deal is," Detroit grunted, keeping his horns out a moment longer. "Ought to be entitled to that, anyway. Just wanted to know."

"So now you do," Leon pointed out. "And because you do there's no backing out, either, not on anybody's part. We're all in this together right to the finish, see?"

"Okay, okay," Detroit agreed, shrugging. "I wanted to know what I was getting into, that's all. You don't mind, do you?"

"Yeah, think maybe I do," Leon told him, deciding that it might be about time for a little pressure from his end. "You just been complaining and finding fault with this and that ever since we picked you up. But now you've been told the whole story, mister, so now you ain't walkin' out on us. You know too much. Right, fellows?"

The fat man smiled politely and nodded his head, while L.A. kept his brightly glittering brown eyes fixed dead-center on Detroit's chin.

"Okay, okay," Detroit repeated, sending back a low wary glance to each of them, then turning to Leon. "I ain't complaining about nothing at all, pal. Long as I know."

The waitress came back, cutting off any further conversation for the moment. When it was resumed, Leon was shoveling pizza into his mouth, shreds of mozzarella and mushrooms dangling.

"But where's this Little Raoul's hangout?" Detroit demanded. "And how are we handling this thing? I guess maybe I'd like to know that, too."

"Tell you in the car," Leon muttered. "Just hold your horses, huh? What's the time?"

It was twenty minutes of two. An hour more to Little Raoul's country estate and it would be twenty of three—so everybody up there would probably be sound asleep. Little Raoul and company off in dreamland, with nothing to worry about; and suddenly, before they knew—

Paying his bill next door at the gas station, with the others waiting

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for him out in the car, Leon inquired about the new snow tires. Had they been put on yet? It was getting pretty slippery out on the road.

"Joe got it all set," the attendant told him. "Ready to roll. And he tells me you got a beeper on your car. How do those things work out, anyway? You guys cops or something?"

"Huh?" Leon said, checking his bill, so that he did not quite understand for a moment. "What you talking about? What beeper?"

"Well, you know. A radio signal. Joe saw it under your bumper after he got the car jacked up."

"Oh, yeah," Leon said, after a stunned moment. "Damned kid of mine, I guess, twelve years old, and imagining he's Dick Tracy all the time. Glad you told me."

But he walked back to the car thinking furiously, his throat feeling bone-dry. Because the beeper was there, as he verified by pretending he had to tie his shoelace up on the bumper. Beginning to sweat now, despite the cold, Leon detached the beeper and clipped it on the fender of an old pickup truck nearby. Only the fat man and L.A. were in the car, he noticed then. Where was Detroit?

He glared around frantically, then saw Detroit appear from the rest room.

"Looks like you went and wasted your money, walyo," he told Leon. "Snow's just about stopped."

Leon clenched his fist. He felt that he had to kick or punch someone, very hard, and there was one insane instant when he could even have punched Detroit. A beeper on his car? But who could have put it there? When? Why? He stood dazed, the one fist still in hitting position; then he managed to collect himself. He got into the car, but then sat motionless with his hands on the steering wheel.

"Come on, come on," Detroit growled at him. "What are you waiting for, anyway? Get this heap started, will you? Turn your motor on. I'm freezing my tail off."

And Leon did get it started, though with clumsy jerkiness, as if he had to think about what movements to make. His heart beat with slow heavy thumps; there seemed to be a strange dizziness in his head; and when a car came down the road toward him on the opposite lane he had a crazy impulse to drive straight into it, meet it head on.

"Hey," Detroit said, startled this time. "What's the matter, walyo? You feelin' all right?"

Without answering him, Leon headed out into the road, grateful that he at least had had brains enough to get rid of the signal device.

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But what mattered, of course, was the identity of the man who had put it there. Three choices, it came to him, and only three. The fat man; the brown man; and Detroit. They had all deposited their suitcases in Leon's trunk, and so any one of them, when he'd had the top of the trunk lifted, could have clipped on the beeper without Leon seeing him. But who had done it? And why?

Almost immediately it seemed to him that the who was plainly evident, if not the why. He jerked his eyes to Detroit, in the back seat, but then jerked them back just as quickly. It was not an intellectual decision, based on solid facts and cool reasoning, but the sudden and unmistakable uprush in him of pure instinct. Yes, it was Detroit! Who had swung his weight around right from the beginning, as if trying to stir up all the dissension among them that he could? Wasn't that just how a damned cop would have handled it—divide and conquer?

Who else had tried to make himself the big boss and take over command of the whole thing? Yes, it was plainly evident now. All along Leon had felt something out of line about Detroit, and now at last he understood what it was. He had pretended too hard. He was no hood. He was a cop! And now, at a safe distance behind, out of sight, there must be a bunch of other cops who had been tailing Leon all night, and following every single move he made.

But how had they got onto him? He had plotted out every detail with great care, and called good people—Carl Hauber in L.A., Big Eddie McManus in Philadelphia, and Bud Higgins in Detroit. Each of them was one hundred percent reliable, and each of them, when Leon had explained what he wanted, had given him a number to call. There was simply no way one of them could have found out about Little Raoul, because Leon had kept that part to himself. All he wanted, he had explained, was a good tough boy to do an in-and-out job for him, in New York, and they had asked no questions of him. It was all in the day's work to people like them. "Okay, Leon. Glad to oblige. Try this number."

But suppose one of the numbers he called had been tapped? And at that thought Leon felt his hands freeze up solid as rock on the steering wheel. Then the beeper could be explained very simply and easily. So a good tough boy was wanted up in New York, eh? Well, well, well, wasn't that interesting? New York would have been notified right away by Philadelphia or Detroit or L.A., and the good tough boy, whose name and telephone number had been given to Leon by Carl or Bud or Big Eddie, would have been picked up by

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New York the moment he had stepped off the plane. Then New York would have grilled him, broken him, and slipped in their own man to find out what was going on. It would have been no trick at all, when putting his bag in the trunk, for Detroit to clip on the radio signal. And then, obviously, wherever Leon had led, the cops had followed. It was all perfectly understandable. The beeper had proved it out. It was all perfectly clear now.

"What's the matter?" Detroit asked, and Leon became aware that they had been staring eye to eye at each other for some seconds. "Grinding your teeth, are you? But what for, walyo? What's biting you?"

Leon didn't answer, couldn't answer. A sick, savage hatred was boiling in him. He had got everything set up, every tiny detail; he had the new and happy life with Janice out on the coast practically in his grasp; and now this! Detroit had got the whole story now and could just sit back and wait for Leon to drop into his hands like a ripe plum. There was simply no way out. Detroit had him cold.

But hold on a minute! No way out? Detroit had not yet been able to pass the word on to his cop pals, and no longer, even if he didn't know it yet, was he keeping communication with them through the radio signal. So the stupid thing would be for Leon to panic, and the sensible thing would be to think out all the angles quickly and carefully.

First, then, he still held a trump card, with the ringer's cop friends following the pickup truck by this time, not Leon's car—which meant that he wasn't in Detroit's hands any longer, but that Detroit, without knowing it, was now in his. Why was Leon in such despair then? There was no need. It was still possible to go on with Little Raoul, if the ringer could be put out of the way—and he would be! Shut his mouth once and for all, before he had a chance to spill his guts about anything, and Leon would still be in command. Janice, and the new and happy life out on the coast, would still be waiting for him—if he played his cards right.

The cops probably had spotted him back on Third Avenue, when he picked up Detroit, and then taken the license number of his car; but that would be of no help, because Leon always had five or six extra plates for emergency use. And they would have seen Leon himself for only a brief moment or two, in the driver's seat with his hat pulled low. They could not possibly have identified him. Of course they would know that something must have gone wrong when

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their pal failed to report back, but how could they ever figure out what that something was?

So go on with it, Leon encouraged himself. Take the chance! Then he again met Detroit's bleak eyes watching him with fixed wariness, and felt an uncontrollable shiver go down his back. Careful with him, though—damned careful. There must not be even the slightest mistake in handling this guy, or it would be curtains for Leon once and for all. Get into Little Raoul's house, get Detroit alone in there, the other two diverted upstairs, and it would be simple enough to put a bullet into the back of Detroit's head. And why should the two others care about what happened to Detroit? An accident, Leon could tell them; poor Detroit had tripped over a chair, and shot himself to death with his own gun. Well, the hell with him, they would figure. What it meant now, all the better, was a three-way split instead of four.

Leon was still top dog, if he just kept using his head. Nothing to worry about. Just wait for the right moment!

"Where's this house you been talking about?" Detroit rasped. "Where the hell you takin' us? Up to Alaska?"

"Next turnoff," Leon told him. "Only when we get there I ain't driving you right up in front at this hour of night. I'll park the car down the road and we'll go the rest of the way on foot, nice and quiet. Once we get in the house me and him"—thumb jerking to Detroit—"cover the downstairs, and you guys the upstairs. If we do it right, they won't have a chance to give us any trouble at all. Four of us, three of them, see?"

"Any other houses around?" Philadelphia wanted to know.

"Not a one." Leon assured him. "They're off in the woods all to themselves. Just perfect. Don't have to worry about a thing."

"Who's worried?" Detroit asked. "Mean outside of you, of course. Never once in my whole life did I meet a walyo with any guts."

So walyo again, and for the second time Leon could hear his teeth gnashing. But fine! Just wait a while, that was all. Off the Thruway, he followed a narrow road through a small country town, and about a mile and a half farther on he pulled the car in behind a thick stand of pine. The snow had stopped, the skies were beginning to clear, and a few bone-bitter bright stars had become visible. A sudden and savage roar of wind came from under the trees, and blasted over them toward empty space, but Leon took heart from that. They would have to make a little noise getting in, probably, and if they

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did, the wind would come in very handy covering it. So he forged ahead almost cheerfully, and turned right at a narrow cross road.

Then, a few yards in, they could see Raoul's house. It was a weatherbeaten Dutch Colonial, with no lights on, and without even a dog, Leon already knew, for them to worry about.

"That it?" the fat man whispered. "Then what do we do—just break in, or you got a key?"

"No key," Leon whispered back, "but nothing to worry about. The front door's got like little windows all around it on both sides, right down to the knob. So come on now, right after me, and don't make any noise, fellas. Watch it. Here we go."

He led the way up the porch steps, and the others followed. When they were all up on the small porch, crowded together, Leon tapped the butt of his revolver lightly and carefully against the glass pane on a level with the doorknob. Nothing happened. He dashed sweat out of his eyes and tried again. There was a slight tinkle of falling glass this time, but at the same moment the wind blasted again, covering it. As soon as he heard that, Leon slipped his gloved hand through and unlocked the door from inside.

They found themselves in a front hall, with stairs going up on their left, and an open archway to a dim living room on their right. Glancing back at L.A. and the fat man, Leon pointed a silent finger upstairs and nodded to them. They nodded back and quickly but quietly moved up the stairs out of the shadows.

"But one of them could be sleeping down here," he whispered softly into Detroit's ear. "I saw a light on pretty late last week on this side of the hall. Figure we better check it out and make sure. You ready?"

They moved on into the hall, and at a closed door across from the living-room archway Leon put a hand on Detroit's arm and pointed inside. Detroit put his ear to the door, turning in profile to Leon as he did so—hollow cheeks, bleak eyes, revolver up and ready beside his right ear.

But what about upstairs? Not the least sound could be heard from up there, so what were they doing? Leon listened, his hand shaking on Detroit's arm, and suddenly there was a sound—a short muffled cry, instantly cut off, and then two flat reports. Hardly louder than those from a child's popgun. A third followed almost instantly, and Detroit spun low and very fast, facing the stairs.

Then or never, Leon knew. But he must make no mistake, not with this fellow—and of course, prompted by that inner urgency, he did make the mistake. He closed his eyes instinctively, jammed the

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gun against Detroit's back with both hands, and squeezed the trigger. The fat man darted down the stairs toward him, quick as a cat, gun ready.

"What was that shot down here? Did you find any more of them?"

"My fault," Leon explained breathlessly. "Tripped over a chair and my gun went off. I think I shot the big fellow. I think he's dead."

But the fat man crouched suddenly, as if frozen into position, staring at something he must have seen behind Leon. What? Who? But in a sudden sickening rush, remembering that he had fired at Detroit, not through the back of the head, the one foolproof way, but much lower down, under Detroit's shoulder blade, Leon realized what the answer must be, and spun around frantically.

Detroit was on his knees, left hand supporting himself against the wall, gun in his right. Then he put the left hand up to his chest, as if it had become necessary to hold himself together there, and fired once at Leon, in the foolproof way that Leon had neglected to do, right between the eyes.

The fat man shouted something or other, and fired at Detroit, but Detroit was just a shade too quick for him. "Come on," he gasped, eyes glittering, left hand still holding himself. "The whole bunch of you. Come on."

Feet pounded the upstairs hall, and L.A. darted into view. He came very fast, spraying the lower hall with gunfire to cover himself, and Detroit was hit twice, and knocked back each time against the wall. But even so, he got off one more shot, after which L.A. landed at the foot of the stairs, rolled over there and stopped moving.

For a moment or two, in the sudden and aching stillness now, Detroit still knelt against the wall. His eyes glared in turn at the three other men, then up the stairs. When he found that there were no more of them to be seen, he grinned tightly, and waved the gun in his hand as if they should have known better than to try anything like that on him.

The next instant he sprawled flat on his face.

He drew in a deep agonized breath, then started another one. That one, however, was cut off almost at once by a sigh of infinite weariness, and then the whole house got all quiet again, upstairs and down. Wind whined in through the smashed pane, but there was no one to hear it now. Gunsmoke eddied up slowly over the stair rail, and somewhere, but far, far distant, a solitary dog howled.

"Oh, I'm not worried about him at all," LaVerne told her mother

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next morning. "Let him stay out with her all he wants, because I'm going to get him real good this time. Dead to rights, Mama. I went to see that lawyer Mabel O'Shaughnessy told me about, and he's real good. He told me exactly what to do to fix Leon, and even sent a man over yesterday afternoon to do it."

The other end of the line sputtered.

"But just let me tell you," LaVerne said, smiling in triumph at herself in the wall mirror. "He can take her wherever he wants to tonight, and just when they're getting nice and comfy they'll get some visitors, me and two witnesses. That's all I have to do, the lawyer says. Once I catch them together, with the witnesses to back me up, I can get every nickel the bum has. So don't worry about me, because the lawyer and I have it all set. We can follow him wherever he goes, Mama, and he'll never even know it—until the time comes. The lawyer's man put a radio signal on his car, that's how, so all we have to do is to follow it. And then—"

"Q"

## DETECTIVERSE

*LIVES AT STAKE*

*by MARK GRENIER*

Said a dangerous gambler named Trilling:
"I'll play poker with anyone willing.
They can win all they please,
But my gun guarantees
That I'll *still* end up making a killing."

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**a *NEW* Dr. Sam Hawthorne story by**

**EDWARD D. HOCH**

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# THE PROBLEM OF THE OCTAGON ROOM

***by EDWARD D. HOCH***

Old Dr. Sam Hawthorne answered the door on the second ring, and stood blinking into the harsh afternoon sun. He recognized at once the person who stood there, even though they hadn't seen each other in fifty years. "Come in, come in!" he urged. "It's been a long time, hasn't it? A long time since that day in Northmont. No, no, you're not disturbing me. I was expecting someone else, though—a friend who often drops by to hear my stories of the old days. Funny thing, I was going to tell him about you, and about all the others and what happened on the day Sheriff Lens was married. I often think about it, you know. Of all those old mysteries I helped solve back then, the business with the octagon room was unique. Would you like to hear about how it seemed from my viewpoint? Fine, fine! Settle down there and let me pour you—ah—a small libation. We're

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both old now and a little sherry is good for the circulation. Or would you like something stronger? No? Very well. As you know . . ."

It was December of 1929 (Dr. Sam Hawthorne began), and a mild December it was in Northmont. By Saturday the 14th, the day of the wedding, we'd had no snow at all. In fact, it was a sunny day as I remember it, with the temperature hovering around sixty. I was up early, because Sheriff Lens had asked me to be his best man. We'd grown to be close friends during my years in Northmont, and even though he was nearly twenty years older than me he still liked the idea of me being at his side during the wedding service.

"Sam," he'd told me earlier, "it was back in October, that day at the post office, when I realized how much I really loved Vera Brock." Vera was our postmistress, a spunky, solid woman in her forties who'd run the post office in the general store and now had a building of her own. Vera had never been married, and Sheriff Lens was a widower without any children. They'd drifted together out of companionship more than anything else, and now it had blossomed into love. I couldn't have been happier for them both.

Vera Brock, it turned out, had a hidden streak of sentimentality. She told Sheriff Lens that more than anything else she wanted to be married in the famous octagon room at Eden House, because her mother and father had been married at an octagon house on Cape Cod forty-five years earlier. Now the sheriff was a religious man, even if it didn't show too often, and he wanted to be married at the Baptist church just as he'd been the first time. They had a little disagreement about that until I solved the problem by talking to the minister, Dr. Tompkins, who reluctantly agreed to perform the ceremony in the octagon room.

Eden House was a fine old place on the edge of town. It had been built by Joshua Eden in the mid-1800's, during the so-called "octagon craze" that swept the nation and was especially prevalent in upstate New York and New England. His fascination with octagon houses caused him to install a mirrored octagon room on the main floor of his new home. Its construction had been quite simple. He'd taken a large square room, originally designed as a study, and cut off each of the four corners with a mirrored cabinet that reached from floor to ceiling. The width of the mirrored doors was the same as the sections of wall between them, so the shape of the room was a true octagon. When you entered through the room's only outer door you faced the large sunny window on the south side of the house. The

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walls to the left and right, between the mirrored segments, were hung with 19th Century sporting prints. It was an odd but cheerful room, if you didn't mind the mirrors.

Behind each of those mirrored doors was a cabinet with shelves reaching from floor to ceiling. There were books and vases and tablecloths and silverware and china and every sort of knickknack crowded onto the shelves. The room itself was almost bare, with only a small table by the window holding a vase of fresh flowers.

At least that's how it looked when I came to inspect it a few days before the ceremony. My guide was young Josh Eden, grandson of the builder, a handsome young man well aware of the family's tradition in Northmont. He unlocked the thick oak door of the room and pulled it open. "As you know, Dr. Sam, we occasionally rent out the octagon room for weddings and private parties. A lovely place like this should be shared by the community, and the sheriff's marriage is an event that deserves the best setting."

"I'm too young to know much about octagon houses," I admitted.

He grinned at that. "I'm younger than you by a year or two, but I'll try to enlighten you. The eight-sided shape was both functional and efficient, but superstition had something to do with it too. Evil spirits were believed to lurk in right-angled corners, and an octagon house without right-angled corners was believed to be free of them. For this reason the houses were popular with spiritualists. In fact, it's said that seances were held in this very room by friends of my grandfather. Seems to me the spirits they conjured up might have been just as bad as the ones they were avoiding."

I glanced at him. "The room is haunted?"

"Some old ghostly stories," he said with a chuckle. He showed me the crowded cabinets and the view from the window as we discussed the wedding. Before we left I noticed him check the window to make sure it was latched on the inside. The heavy wooden door had a key lock and an inside bolt. He couldn't work the bolt from outside, but he did turn the lock with a long slender key.

"Keeping the ghosts locked in?" I asked with a smile.

"There are some valuable antiques in those cabinets," he explained. "I keep the room locked when it's not in use."

Josh's wife Ellen met us at the front stairs, coming down with a load of laundry to be washed. Her blue eyes sparkled as she greeted me. "Hello there, Dr. Sam. I was wondering when you'd come by. Good to see you again!"

She was flushed with the health and beauty of youth, and a bright

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cheerfulness that always made me envious of Josh Eden. They'd met at college and married soon after, and though they were both a few years younger than me they seemed somehow to be in full charge of their lives. Josh's father Thomas deserted the family after the war, preferring to remain in Paris with a dancer he'd met there. The shock had been too much for Josh's poor mother, who'd died from it, and from the influenza outbreak of 1919.

Josh went on to college and in time the courts ruled his father was dead too, though there was no evidence of it except his continued silence. Eden House had passed to Josh, along with a small inheritance. He'd wisely invested in land rather than stocks, and the recent Wall Street crash had left him virtually unscathed. Still, there was money to be made from renting out the octagon room on occasion. Ellen even talked of converting the entire house to a restaurant if an amendment to repeal Prohibition was ever passed. There was already talk that mounting unemployment might be countered by the jobs created through the rebirth of the liquor industry.

"We're getting ready for the big day on Saturday," I told Ellen. "I just came over to look at the room."

"I'll bet Sheriff Lens is nervous," she said with a grin.

"Not so's you could notice. After all, he's been through it before. It's the first time for Vera."

"I know they'll be very happy," Ellen said.

She seemed quite pleased by the prospect of the wedding, and when we trooped over for the rehearsal on Friday evening she surprised Vera and the sheriff with a hand-made quilt as a wedding present.

"That's so nice!" Vera exclaimed. "We'll have it on our bed!"

"It's just a little something from Josh and me," Ellen murmured. She seemed more subdued than on my previous visit, possibly because of the intimidating presence of Dr. Tompkins.

The minister arrived dressed in a gray suit, greeted Sheriff Lens and Vera with somber good wishes, and then turned to me. "You understand, Dr. Hawthorne, that the service tomorrow morning must be at ten o'clock sharp. I have another wedding over in Shinn Corners at noon. In a church."

"Don't worry," I assured him, beginning to feel a bit sorry I'd ever become involved with such a pompous man.

We ran quickly through the rehearsal in the octagon room, with Josh and Ellen Eden watching from the doorway. The sheriff and

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Vera had wanted only two attendants. I was the best man and Vera's close friend Lucy Cole was the maid of honor. Lucy was a charming Southern girl in her late twenties who'd moved to Northmont a year earlier. She helped out sometimes at the post office and had become a close friend of Vera's in the past year.

"You know, Sam," Vera had told me earlier, "if it wasn't for Lucy's encouragement I never could have agreed to marry the sheriff. Once you pass forty, gettin' married for the first time is an awesome decision."

"But she's never been married, has she?"

"No, not unless she's got a husband down south she's not talkin' about."

Lucy was an open, attractive young woman—not unlike Ellen Eden in some ways. I couldn't help feeling they were the vanguard of a new age. The books and magazines might be filled with stories of big-city flappers, but I preferred women more like Lucy Cole and Ellen Eden.

After the rehearsal Josh carefully locked the door of the octagon room and walked out with us to my car. "We'll see you all in the morning," he said. A wedding breakfast for a few close friends would be held nearby, followed by a reception later.

I drove the wedding party back to my apartment and opened a bottle of genuine Canadian whiskey. Sheriff Lens sputtered some about breaking the law, but after all it was the night before his wedding. We toasted the bride, and we toasted the groom, and then we toasted Lucy and me for good measure.

I was up early in the morning because I'd promised my nurse April that I'd drive her to the wedding in my car. She was chatty and excited, as she always was at the prospect of weddings and parties. We picked up Sheriff Lens on the way, and I had to admit I'd never seen him dressed so handsomely. I adjusted his formal morning coat and straightened his tie.

"Keep your stomach in and you'll be fine," I said as we walked to the car. "You look great."

"You got the ring, Doc?"

"Don't worry." I patted the pocket of my own coat.

"You both look handsome enough to be on the wedding cake!" April exclaimed as we climbed in the car. "Can I marry the one that's left over?"

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"Being a doctor's wife is even worse than being a doctor's nurse," I told her with a chuckle and started the car.

As we pulled up to Eden House, Vera was just getting out of Lucy Cole's little sedan. "Oh, look!" April pointed. "There's the bride!" Then, remembering our passenger, she quickly added, "Don't you look, Sheriff Lens. You're not supposed to see her till the ceremony."

Vera Brock was all in white, with a fancy lace wedding gown that trailed to the ground. She held it up with both hands as she ran to the door of Eden House. In that moment she was a girl again, half her age, and I could see why Sheriff Lens loved her. I parked the car and walked over to meet Lucy.

"Beautiful day for it," I remarked, looking at the cloudless sky. "Maybe this'll be the year without a winter."

Vera had reappeared at the front door, looking slightly exasperated. "They can't get the door of the octagon room open. It's stuck or something."

This seemed to be yet another job for the best man. "I'll go see about it," I said.

Inside I found Ellen Eden and her husband standing together at the thick oak door of the octagon room, looks of bafflement on their faces. "The door won't open," Josh said. "This has never happened before."

I took the key from him and tried it in the lock. It turned, and I could tell the lock was working properly, but still the door would not open. "There's a bolt inside, isn't there?"

"Yes," Josh replied, "but it could only be worked by someone inside the room. And there's no one inside."

"Are you sure about that?"

Josh and his wife exchanged glances. "I'll go around and look in the window," she said.

At this point Dr. Tompkins walked in, already glancing at the large gold pocket watch in his hand. "I hope we're on schedule. As you know, I have a noon wedding in—"

"Just a short delay," I told him. "The door seems to be stuck."

"That doesn't happen in churches."

"I'm sure not."

Ellen hurried in through the back door, out of breath. "The shade is drawn, Josh! You didn't leave it like that, did you?"

"Certainly not! Someone's in there."

"But how could they get in?" I asked reasonably. "I saw you lock up and latch the window."

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"The window's still latched," Ellen confirmed.

The minister began to sputter and Josh said, "Please bear with us. We'll break down the door if necessary."

I tapped it with my fist. "That's pretty thick oak."

Josh joined me and pounded on the door. "Open up in there, whoever you are!" he shouted. "We know you're there!"

But there was only silence from behind the door.

"A burglar, probably," Sheriff Lens reasoned. "Trapped and afraid to come out."

"We can break in the window," I suggested.

"No!" Ellen said. "Not unless we have to. We couldn't replace it before Monday and it's December, after all. A sudden storm could damage the room. Look, can't you all pull on the knob? That bolt on the other side of the door isn't very strong."

We followed her advice, turning the knob and yanking. The door seemed to move a fraction of an inch. "April," I called over my shoulder, "bring the tow rope from the trunk of my car."

She returned with it in a few moments, grumbling about getting her hands dirty. We attached the stout rope to the doorknob, made sure again it was unlocked, and Josh and I tugged.

"It's giving!" he said.

"Sheriff," I called out. "I know it's your wedding day, but could you lend us a hand?"

The three of us gave a mighty pull on the rope. It was like the games of tug-of-war I'd played as a child, and we were rewarded by the screeching of screws being pried from wood. The door sprang open, sending us backward, off balance for an instant. Then Josh and I ran into the octagon room together, with Ellen close behind.

Even in the dim light from the shaded window we could make out the man in the center of the floor, arms and legs thrown wide. His clothes were the shabby costume of a tramp, and I'd never seen him before. But with a slim silver dagger in his chest, I had no doubt that he was dead.

Behind me, Lucy Cole screamed.

I stepped around the dead man and crossed the dim room to raise the shade. The single window was indeed latched, and though it was only turned halfway that was enough to lock it firmly. The latch turned easily and I tried to see if it could have been operated somehow from outside, but the window frames fit together snugly, leaving no gap. The panes themselves were unbroken.

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I turned back to the room. The door had opened outward, so there was no hiding place behind it. The mirrored cabinets—

"Aren't you going to examine the body?" Josh asked.

"I can see he's dead. Right now it's more important to examine the room."

I was especially interested in the inside bolt which had been pried from its wooden moorings by our tugging. It hung now from the door jamb, the twin screws having been pulled from the door itself. But examining the holes and the traces of wood shavings on the screw threads, I was convinced the bolt had been firmly screwed into the wood of the door.

I noticed a piece of string knotted around the doorknob and tried to remember if it had been there the previous evening. I didn't think so, but I couldn't be sure.

"He's dead, all right," Dr. Tompkins was saying.

I turned from the door. "Dead several hours, judging by the color of his skin. I didn't mean to seem heartless but sometimes you can tell by looking. Does anyone know him?"

Ellen and Josh shook their heads and the minister grumbled, "A tramp passing through town. Sheriff, you shouldn't allow—"

"I recognize him," Lucy Cole said quietly from the doorway.

"Who is he?" I asked her.

"I didn't mean I knew him, just that I recognized him. There were two of them yesterday, walking near the railroad tracks. Both hobos, I suppose. I remember that long stringy hair and the dirty red vest, and those little scars on his face."

Josh Eden came forward to kneel beside the body. "That dagger looks like a silver letter opener from one of our cabinets. Ellen, see if it's missing."

She walked carefully around the body and opened the mirrored door to the left of the window. After rummaging for a moment she said, "It's not here. There may be other things missing too. I can't be sure."

"While we're at it," I suggested, "we'd better check all four of these cabinets."

"What for?" Josh asked.

I was staring down at the body. "Well, unless the killer is hidden inside, on one of those big shelves, it looks like we've got ourselves a murder committed in a particularly impenetrable locked room."

So many things happened in those next few hours that it's hard

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now to remember them all. But we searched each of the four mirrored cabinets with care and found no one hidden there. I also took measurements to make sure no cabinet had a false back. When we finished I was convinced the killer was not hiding in the room—nor was there any secret passage or trap door out of the room. There was only the single door, bolted from inside, and the single window, latched from inside.

I'd already studied the window latch. Now I went and knelt on the floor by the door, examining the piece of string I'd found knotted around the knob. "Is this string usually here?" I asked Ellen Eden.

She stared at it. "No, it's not ours—unless Josh tied it there for some reason."

But he hadn't. That left the killer or the victim as the likely possibilities. A year or two earlier I'd read S.S. Van Dine's mystery novel, *The Canary Murder Case*, which included a diagram of how a pair of tweezers and a piece of string could be used to turn a door handle from outside a room. It was a clever idea, but it didn't apply to this situation.

I tried to imagine a way in which the string could have been looped around the bolt and pulled to close it, but for one thing the string wasn't long enough. And for another, the door fit so snugly to the jamb that there was not even room for a string to pass through. Even on the bottom, a small strip of wood was nailed to the floor inside the door, apparently to cut down on drafts. I found a longer piece of string and tried shutting the door on it. The fit was so tight the string could not be pulled.

My preoccupation with the locked room had made me forget everything else. Sheriff Lens came to me presently and said, "Doc, it's almost eleven o'clock. The minister's about to leave for Shinn Corners."

"My God! The wedding!"

For all Vera's enchantment with the octagon room, she refused to be married in a room where the blood was not yet dry on the floor. The wedding guests, kept waiting in the cool outside air, were told of the change in plans. We all piled into cars and drove to the nearby church. Though he was miffed by the delay, Dr. Tompkins felt some sort of triumph in getting the ceremony moved to the church. He hurried through the ceremony, paused long enough to shake the groom's hand and peck at the bride's cheek, then vanished toward his noon appointment in a cloud of dust.

"How's it feel to be married again?" I asked the sheriff.

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"Wonderful!" he said, hugging his bride with an uncharacteristic display of emotion. "But it looks like we'll have to delay the honeymoon."

"How come?"

"Well, I'm still the sheriff here, Doc, and I got a murder on my hands."

For the moment I'd forgotten about that. "You go ahead on your honeymoon, Sheriff. Your deputies can handle things."

"Them two?" he snorted. "They couldn't find a skunk in a suitcase!"

I took a deep breath. "Don't you worry, I've got it under control."

"You mean you know who killed that guy? And how it was done in a locked room?"

"Sure. Don't you worry about it. We'll have the killer in a cell by nightfall."

His eyes widened in admiration. "If that's true we can leave on our honeymoon right after the reception."

"By all means. Don't give the murder another thought."

I turned away, wondering how I'd go about fulfilling that promise.

I started out by taking the maid of honor for a ride in my car. "This isn't the way to the reception," Lucy said after a few minutes. "You're heading back toward town."

"Right now this is more important than the reception," I told her. "You said you saw the dead man walking with someone else."

"Another hobo, that's all."

"Would you recognize the other man if you saw him again?"

"I don't know. I might. He had a bald spot on the back of his head. I remember that much. And a plaid scarf wrapped around his neck."

"Let's go looking."

"But the reception—"

"We'll get there."

I drove down by the railroad station and then followed the street that ran parallel to the tracks. Chances were the dead man's friend was miles away by now, riding some fast freight, especially if he'd been involved in the killing. Still, it was worth the time to try to find him.

A few miles the other side of Northmont we came upon a hobo camp in among the trees. "Wait here," I told Lucy. "I won't be long."

I made my way down the worn path, moving openly through the trees in hopes that the men around the campfire wouldn't panic and

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flee. One of them, warming his hands near the flames, turned as I approached. "What you want?" he asked.

"I'm a doctor."

"Nobody sick here."

"I'm looking for a man who passed this way yesterday. Wearing a plaid scarf, with a bald spot on his head." I added, "No hat," since that seemed obvious.

"Nobody like that," the man by the fire said. Then he asked, "What you want with him? He ain't got a disease, has he?"

"We don't know what he's got. That's why we're trying to find him."

One of the other men came over to the fire. He was small and nervous and spoke with a southern accent. "It sounds like Mercy, don't it?"

"Shut up!" the first man growled. "This might be a railroad dick for all we know."

"I'm not any sort of dick," I insisted. "Look here." From my pocket I produced a pad of blank prescriptions with my name and address printed across the top. "Does this convince you I'm a doctor?"

The first man looked suddenly sly. "If you're a doctor you could write us a prescription for some whiskey. They sell it in drug stores."

"For medicinal purposes," I said, beginning to feel a bit uneasy. A third man had appeared and was moving around behind me.

Then suddenly Lucy began blowing the horn on my car. The three men, realizing I wasn't alone, backed away. One of them broke into a run toward the tracks. I grabbed the little one, nearest to me, and asked, "Where's Mercy?"

"Let go!"

"Tell me and you're free. Where is he?"

"Down the tracks by the water tower. He's waiting for his friend."

"You know who the friend is?"

"No. They're just travelin' together."

I let go of his collar. "You'd better clear out of here," I warned. "The local sheriff's a mean one."

I ran back to the car and climbed in. "Thanks for blowing the horn," I told Lucy.

"I got scared when they started circling you."

"So did I." We drove down the road along the tracks. "The man we want may be at the water tower."

The tower came into view, outlined against the sky, and suddenly

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we saw a man in a long shabby coat break from cover and run toward the woods. "I think that's him!" Lucy exclaimed.

I followed after him as far as I could in the car, keeping the bald spot and the flapping plaid scarf in sight. Then I was out of the car and chasing him on foot. I was a good twenty years younger than he was, and I ran him down quickly.

He squirmed in my grip and whined, "I didn't do anything wrong!"

"Are you the one they call Mercy?"

"Yes, I guess so."

"I'm not going to hurt you. I just want to ask some questions."

"What about?"

"You were seen with another man yesterday. He had long stringy hair, turning gray, and was wearing a dirty red vest. Man in his fifties, about your age, with some scars on his face."

"Yeah, we rode up from Florida together."

"Who is he? Tell me about him."

"Name's Tommy, that's all I know. We shared a boxcar from Orlando to just outside New York, then we hopped another train up here."

"Why'd you want to come here?" I asked. "Why travel from Florida to New England in December? Do you like snow?"

"He wanted to come here, an' I didn't have anything better to do."

"Why was he coming here?"

"Said he could get a lot of money up here. Money that belonged to him."

"And he told you to wait here?"

"Yeah. He left me last night. Said he should be back by noon, but I haven't seen him."

"You won't be seeing him," I said. "Someone murdered him during the night."

"God!"

"What else did he say about the money that belonged to him? Where was it?"

"He didn't tell me."

"He must have said something. You were with him all the way from Florida."

The man called Mercy looked away nervously. "All he said was that he was coming home. Coming home to Eden."

I dropped Lucy Cole at the restaurant where the reception was being held and then drove back to Eden House. It was almost dark

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when I pulled up in front, the brief December sun already vanished beyond the line of trees to the west. Josh Eden came to the door, looking tired and troubled.

"How did the wedding go?" he asked.

"Very well, all things considered. They'll be leaving on their honeymoon soon."

"I'm glad this terrible event didn't ruin the day for them."

"I was wondering if I could see the octagon room again. Sheriff Lens asked me to assist his deputies in the investigation."

"Certainly." He led the way into the house. The door stood open and I could see he'd been working on repairing the damaged woodwork where the bolt had been torn loose. The room itself was in semi-darkness, with the drawn shade admitting only a single spot of fading light through a pinhole in its middle.

"I had to draw the shade," Josh Eden explained. "The neighborhood kids were all coming to look in at the murder scene."

"Kids will do that," I agreed. "But the shade was usually left up at night, wasn't it?"

"Oh, yes—you saw me lock up yesterday. The shade was up."

"Then either the victim or his killer had to lower it."

"Seems so. If they had a light on they might not have wanted outsiders to see what they were doing."

"Which was—?"

"Why, robbing me, of course! It seemed obvious enough. Lucy Cole said she saw the dead man with another tramp yesterday. The two of them got in here to rob me, had an argument, and the other one stabbed him with that dagger letter opener."

"How'd they get in without forcing a door or window? More important, how'd the killer get out?"

"I don't know," he admitted.

"The dead man's name was Tommy."

Josh raised his eyes to meet mine. "How'd you find that out?"

"He traveled north from Florida to come here, to Eden House, to regain his fortune."

"What are you saying, Sam?"

"I think the dead man was your father. The father who never came back from the war."

It had grown so dark in the octagon room that we could barely see each other. Josh reached for the wall switch and snapped on the overhead light. Instantly our mirror images were reflected in the

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cabinet doors. "That's insane!" he said. "Don't you think I'd know my own father?"

"Yes, I do. You might have known him enough to kill him when he returned after twelve years to take back your house and inheritance. He wasn't your father any more. He was merely the man who'd deserted you and your mother all those years ago."

"I didn't kill him," Josh insisted. "I didn't even know him!"

I heard a movement behind me in the hall. "I know you didn't," I said with a sigh. "Come in, Ellen, and tell us why you murdered your father-in-law."

She stood there, pale and trembling, in the doorway of the octagon room. I had seen her reflection in the glass, knew she'd been listening to every word. "I—I didn't mean to—" she gasped, and Josh ran to her side.

"Ellen, what's he saying? This can't be true!"

"Oh, it's true enough," I told him. "And she'd have had a much better chance convincing a jury it was an accident if she hadn't gone to such lengths to cover her traces with this locked-room business. Your father, Tommy, came here last night to take back what was his. You slept through it all, but Ellen heard him at the door and let him in. I suppose she took him into this room so their voices wouldn't awaken you. And there he was, this tramp insisting he was your father, saying he wasn't dead at all and he'd come to take back Eden House. She saw her plans for the place—the restaurant and all the rest of it—going up in smoke. She went to the cabinet, seized that silver letter opener shaped like a dagger, and plunged it into his chest in a moment of insane fury."

Josh was still shaking his head in disbelief. "How could you know that? How could she have killed him and left the room locked from the inside?"

"I didn't know how it was done until I came back here just now, until we walked in here and I saw that pinhole of light in the center of the shade."

"There is a hole in the shade! Funny I never noticed it before."

"I'm sure it wasn't there until last night. You see, this octagon room is different from many rooms in two respects—the door and the window are exactly opposite each other, and the door opens outward."

"I don't see—"

"Ellen tied a string to the doorknob and attached the other end

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to the window latch. Then she went out the window. When we yanked open the door this morning, the string turned the latch and locked the window. It's as simple as that."

Josh's mouth fell open. "Wait a minute—"

"I examined the latch as soon as we entered the room. It worked very easily and it was only turned halfway—just enough to lock the window. She'd put a loose loop of string around it, and when the latch reached the halfway mark, pointing into the room, the string slid off just as she'd planned. Of course I never thought of anything like that because the shade was drawn. That's why she made the tiny hole in the shade—for the string to pass through. After she climbed out the window she had to lower the window and the shade together to keep the string in position, but that wasn't difficult. The slight slack in the string was taken up quickly enough when we opened the door."

"If this is true what happened to the string?"

"The loop was yanked off the latch and through the hole in the shade. It probably trailed along the floor somewhere. We didn't notice it in the dim light when we burst into the room. I went immediately to the window to examine it, and you two were right behind me. Ellen simply grabbed the string and snapped it off the doorknob. She'd have liked to get it all, but it broke and she had to leave the piece around the knob."

"Even if I believe that, why does it have to be Ellen? There were several of us present. Myself, Lucy Cole—"

He wanted so much to believe in her innocence. I hated to shatter his last hope. "It had to be Ellen, Josh—don't you see that? It was Ellen who went around the back of the house and told us the window was latched. It was Ellen who persuaded us not to break in through the window but to pull on the door—that was the only way her scheme would work. It had to be Ellen and no one else."

"But why make it a locked room in the first place? Why go to the trouble and risk?"

"He was too big for her to carry the body off somewhere. Ideally she should have left the window open so he would look like a burglar killed by his partner. But you see Ellen didn't know about any partner until Lucy mentioned seeing two hobos together. That convinced me Lucy wasn't involved—because she surely would have left the window open to implicate the other hobo. No, Ellen had to leave the body where it was, so she wanted it locked away from the rest of the house, cut off from you and her. She bolted the door and

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set the string to latch the window, perhaps imagining the death would be blamed on the old ghostly stories about the room."

Finally he removed his protective arms from his wife and stepped back to ask, "Is this true, Ellen?"

Old Dr. Sam Hawthorne leaned back in his chair and reached for his glass. "And of course it was true, wasn't it, Ellen?"

The woman across from him was almost as old as he, but she held herself erect and proud. Her face was lined and her hair was white, but it was still Ellen Eden, not that much different, considering the passage of fifty years. "Of course it was true, Sam. I killed the old man then and I would do it again. I don't blame you for helping send me to prison. They were long years but I never blamed you for that. What I blame you for is my loss of Josh."

"I had nothing to do with—"

"I went to prison and after a time he divorced me. That was the blow—to know that I'd never be going back to Eden House. And then I heard he married Lucy Cole."

"Those things happen. The two of you were very much alike. I'm not surprised he turned to her after you were gone."

"But you see I killed the old man to save Eden House, to preserve my dream of its future. And that was what you took away from me—Eden House and Josh."

"I'm sorry."

"After I was released from prison I moved across the country. But I never forgot you, Sam. Sometimes I thought I wanted to kill you for ruining my life."

"You ruined your own life, Ellen."

She sighed and seemed to slump in her chair. The life, the fight, had almost gone out of her. But not quite. "I killed a man who deserted his family for another woman, who came back a bum to steal from his own son. Was that such a bad thing for me to do?"

Sam Hawthorne studied her face for a long time before replying. Then he said, very quietly, "Tommy Eden never left his family for another woman, Ellen. He stayed in France after the war because his face was terribly disfigured by a wound. To me as a doctor those little scars meant plastic surgery, and that explained why Josh didn't recognize his own father's body. I never mentioned it at the trial because Josh had enough grief already. But the man you killed didn't deserve to die. And the sentence you served in prison was a just one."

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She took a deep breath. "Ten years ago I might have killed you too, Sam. Now I'm too tired."

"We're all tired, Ellen. Here, let me call you a taxi."

"Well," Dr. Sam Hawthorne said, "come right in! I was expecting you earlier. That old woman getting into the taxi? Funny thing, I'd planned to tell you about her this very day. Settle down while I pour us a little refreshment. If you've got the time, after I tell about the octagon room, I'll give you another story that happened soon afterward—a baffling medical mystery at Pilgrim Memorial Hospital, about a man who died with a bullet in his heart but not a wound on his body!"

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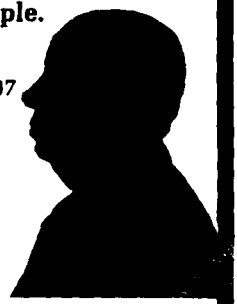

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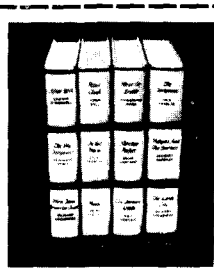

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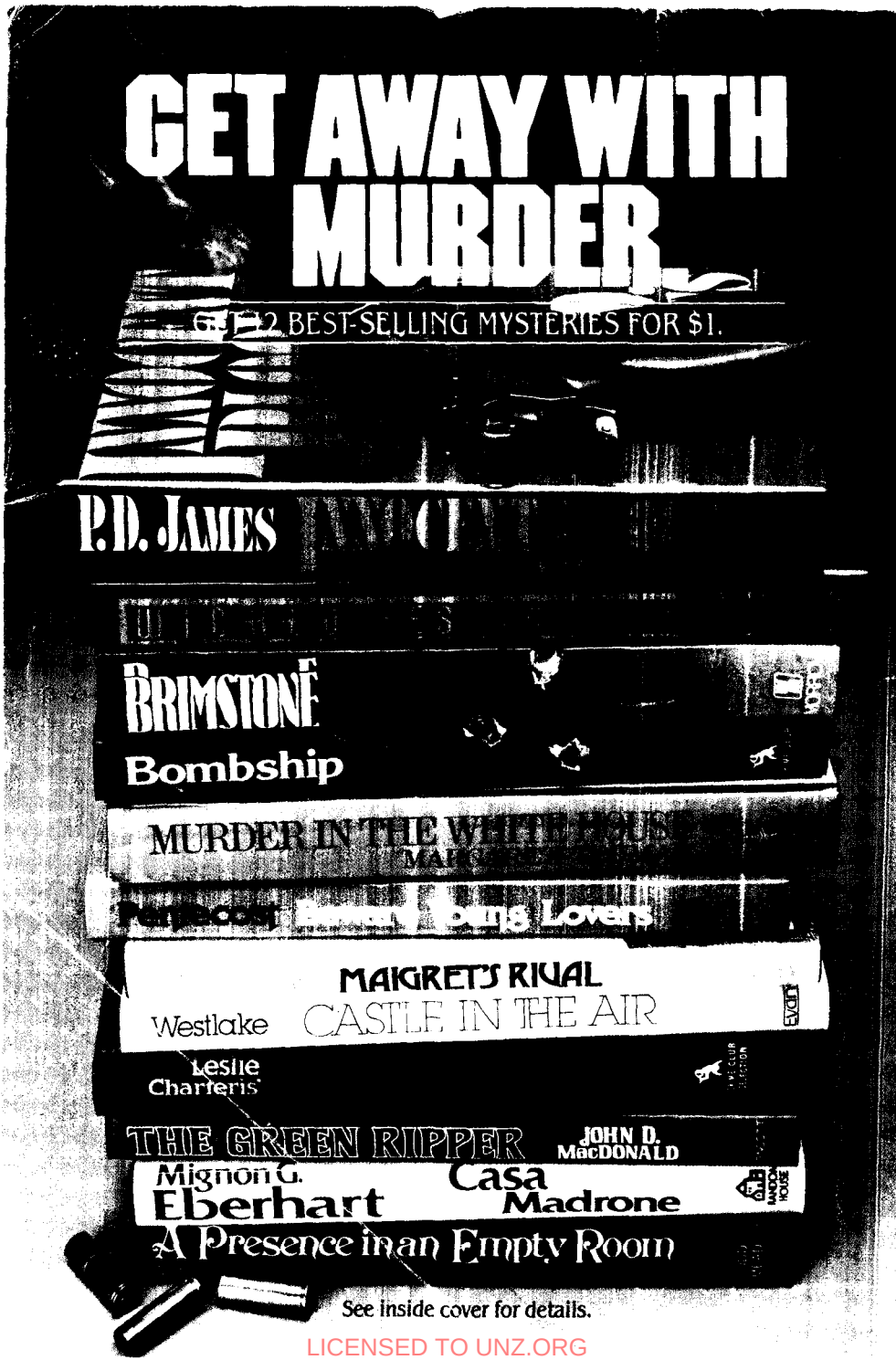


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